

Not the Whole Truth

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Truth is something which cannot be written , not that it harms the author but it may do so to the others. thus a partial truth

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Twenty Five Years in Pakistan Army 1982-2007

Memoirs of a Field Officer

Beginning of Journey

It was Sunday the 5th of November 1982 when at around 1000 hours I boarded the Ford wagon from Rawalpindi Saddar for Abbottabad, to join the Pakistan Military Academy for a two year training. It was the watershed of my life and probably for any boy of seventeen ,after all over twenty five thousand boys apply for being commissioned as an officer and just over two hundred are selected ,I was happy and excited and other than this I had no more idea of life in military academy. I stayed the night in Colonel Ghias's house, well he was a retired second world war veteran Supply officer and was our neighbour in Karachi and I knew him since 1971,his daughter Rubina and her husband Ayaz himself a captain had received me at the airport¹ yesterday and last night which was my last night as a civilian , I went through the

¹ Rubina was murdered by her husband after finding her in bed with regimental doctor, husband shot himself too, a tragic end, it happened in 1987 at Mardan Punjab Regimental Centre.

picture albums of another Captain Ayaz who is colonel's son and was in special services group{SSG}, I was impressed by the pictures of parachutes and similar stuff and made two mental decisions, one I will also have myself photographed and second I will join the special services group as well, I also packed few filmy magazines in my bag with an idea that since there will be time available in academy thus I will scan them, I did not paid any particular attention to colonels remarks 'sleep as much as you can, you will miss it'{colonel died couple of years back in America and so is Rubina and her husband; he shot her and then committed suicide }.

In the wagon there was another cadet who was also going to the academy, in fact we were the last ones and were already late by a week due to official reasons. He was Ghazi and already undergoing training in air force academy as pilot and was being transferred to military academy because he was not good enough to become a pilot, being experienced he was worried about the forthcoming time ,whereas I in my ignorance was happy and cheerful. It all started almost six months ago, I was in college and despite being a brilliant student in my school days I had lost concentration in studies mainly because I failed to pick up scientific formulas and more importantly I was living with my step mother in Karachi , my father was flying in commercial airline and my own mother was living and working in a school

in Bahawalpur I was her only son and I used to see her in my summer holidays, all this in that age had its toll on my personality and the way I looked at the world, resultantly grades started dropping , had it not been two miracles I would have never even passed the college, first took place in first year final examination, the student sitting next to me was a mathematics genius and I copied all his answers and did same in physics and chemistry as well, I had 89% marks in mathematics and over all a very good grade, I got serious in second year but without any firm foundation it was very difficult yet I managed and again in final examination in chemistry paper I was about to hand over my paper in despair to the examiner when my best friend Khalid Nabi a very good cricketer literally begged me not to do so and at great risk he gave me the formulas and I completed the paper.

After the exams and before the results there was a gap of almost three months and I simply wanted to get away from this life and house, thus I went around all selection centres, navy, airforce ,maritime and army as well . In the first step I went to army selection centre which at that time was located on Martin road Karachi, got the forms , filled it and handed over with a certificate from my principal that I am likely to pass the college exams, than I sat in a preliminary exam and passed it, there were over hundred candidates, than the first

medical and I was deferred because I had a some nose problem, my father got me operated in a an airforce hospital at Mauripur, because doctor was on airline panel as well, I have very vivid memories of those days, it was winter time and Pakistan cricket team was touring Australia and I followed it on radio, anyhow I was cleared in the medical and now awaited for main and final selection at inter services selection board. By this time I was in Lahore on summer holidays and used to run a mile everyday in the Punjab university grounds new campus, at that time it was all open and spacious. My aunt's husband was serving in army Lieutenant Colonel Bashir² and he kept a track of my application and finally I got the call to report at the Gujranwala selection centre for five days tests. There was a mystery and myth about what happens in ISSB, there were books available and there were private training centres which all through their advertisement guaranteed success , the way cheap sex books and sex therapists give assurance ,on any given day if you pass through the bazaar you really cannot differentiate where these two divergent fields hoardings and books finish or start.

Inter Services Selection Board{ISSB}

² He and aunt are both dead now, she in an car accident, he a cardiac arrest last year.

In my batch which reported at Gujranwala cantonment and cantonment at that time was under construction, we were over forty boys, all accommodated in two rooms, first day we fill forms and forms and more forms. There was an air of mystery around, some one said 'these waiters are infact officers and they are just there to observe you' thus everyone started treating the waiters with utmost respect and deference, less Asim who would rather tease the waiters. ISSB is meant to test the obvious and hidden qualities and capabilities of a youngster desiring to earn a commission in armed forces, i am not sure but the standard for becoming a pilot in Pakistan Air Force are much higher than army or navy. The test are spanned over five days in which all the time some kind of activity is going on, group discussions in which the candidates already divided into certain groups and headed and monitored by an officer are given a topic to have a discussion and every one is encourages or is expected to take part in it and express his opinion, the myth is that you should be the first one to speak up, well to some extent it is true but there is always a thin line of being confidence and being rowdy and overbearing. The other test includes depicting a picture and then writing what comes up in your mind the favourite picture was showing a boy and girl in a dark night stranded on a road, the depiction can be many, for instance they are both friends and were out for a picture without their

parents knowledge and now it has become dark and rainy furthermore both have lost money as well, the other scenario is both are sister and brother and going back home after attending their sick relatives and their home is within a stone throw; the point to highlight is that it is probably the upbringing and social background which will create the picture in the mind, however whatever we wrote about the picture we all were convinced that they are friends and out on a date. Another test involved a physical group leadership qualities check out, in it every candidate is made a leader and he has to take his group consisting of six or seven other boys across obstacles, the test is built around that famous story in which you have a lion and a goat and a boat to take them across a stream but the limitation is that only one animal can go at one time, the test is not difficult but the key element is in displaying a physical ability and capability to bear physical endurance, i remember this test very well because after i was made the leader and given the scenario, the officer in-charge nodded his head and started the time but i remained motionless and waited for his further direction but he remained absolutely cold and in next instance i realised that there are no more guidance or help and my mind started working instantly, i could not take the whole group in a organise manner yet in the end i made a dive from a height and distance to reach the end line, i think the key issues are how you react and behave with others,

you have to be assertive but not bad mouth and same holds true for when it is your turn to be a worker. There was an interview as well in which general knowledge was tested since it was General Zia's era thus we all had read and remembered the Islamic relics by heart.

At the end of fifth day few boys including myself were detained and rest were told to leave, it was great suspense, they thought that we have been selected where as we had similar opinion about them, finally it was revealed that we are the selected lot for 70th Long Course and course has already started and thus we should report next day to General Headquarters at Rawalpindi from where we will be issued the joining instructions. Without any doubt it was the happiest moment of my life till then ,myself, Wadi bin Hanif, and Farrukh all selected reached the main road from ISSB sitting on a tractor as there was no other transport available, laughing and joking. Same night I travelled from Lahore to Rawalpindi on a coach not before a sumptuous dinner given by my aunty Nasreen and there was no limit of joy in my family, my mother ,aunty ,uncle and grand mother were all on moon and I first time realised how important and vital this selection is, I simply cannot even think what course my life would have taken had I failed to pass this selection. From Rawalpindi I flew back to Karachi because I had to buy a kit specified by the army and my father's happiness had no limits over this ,thus

he in a very meticulous manner made sure that all items are there, my father departing gesture was when he handed me his Parker pen from his uniform pocket.

It was the most satisfying period of my life at that time i was in cloud nine and just wanted to tell everyone on the streets that i have been selected for the army, all of a sudden i felt a change in my parents behaviour towards me my father who before this never took me seriously in any matter and i mean any matter now all of a sudden was treating me in an equal manner,he had no objections on my friends coming to home and meeting me, i went to every house on the street without any purpose and informed everyone that i am going to military academy next week, my one of the step relative who very recently had introduced me in a gathering in a rather insulting manner ‘meet him he is captain aamir,not of army but of street cricket team’ was happy to see me .I had no idea about the military academy all i was thinking now was the action that i will be having and the time when i will be in a war[all effects of reading too much Reader’s Digest}.My father very happily took me around the city to buy the kit which i was supposed to take along, he got me a warm suit stitched by his tailor at Nursery Karachi and the tailor promised to deliver it within a month.

I got a flight from Karachi to Rawalpindi it was a Boeing 747 and i sat with the joining instructions in

my hand i wanted everyone to see it and ask me about it, in the aircraft were Salim Malik and Abdul Qadir both young cricketers i got Malik's autograph on my airline ticket.

Pakistan Military Academy 1982-1984

Reminiscences

It was evening when we reached Abbottabad, the journey took and takes over two hours through scenic mountainous road, it is the start of mountains and Abbottabad field elevation is 4500 feet, it was founded in last century by a British officer James Abbottabad, and mainly it had the training centres of various regiments, after independence in 1947 the newly raised Pakistan Army an off shoot of British Indian army, selected old officers training corps centre at Abbottabad as future cradle of training for its officers

I got down from the wagon at the bus stop and walked towards the reception board which displayed 'New Cadets' to report ,there was an soldier smartly dressed and he guided me towards a army truck and I got on board with my holdall and trunk which the soldier directed someone to carry for me ,I felt elevated that at last there is someone to carry my luggage and for

another an hour I remained in that state. From the bus stop we moved and when truck entered the military academy gate ,it was dark and I felt an unknown fear creeping inside me, Truck stopped after a short but steep drive and we all got down

First order was to put on the ties, which I did found in my trunk but I did not knew how to tie it,I was helped by the Ghani ,we all and we were around a dozen stood in front of a wooden barrack ,it was getting cold and dark. On my turn I entered the barrack and I saw two gentlemen sitting behind a table, I was offered a chair and then one of them Major Farooq asked me few questions ,which game you play? My answer was none, Any other hobbies? And I recalled that I have won few cups in debates and I replied in English ,yes and after some little talks among themselves I was issued ‘Gentleman Cadet no 19814,Babur Company’ and with a nod of their head I was dismissed and I came out of barrack and from this point onwards the life for next two years in general and for next two months in particular became a roller coaster,

As I walked towards my luggage the drill staff told me to get on one side, his tone was very harsh and all the niceties of last one hour had gone, another cadet walked and asked me ‘which place you are disgracing ?’ I had no answer , mentally I was stunned , okay start front rolling , he gave a word of command to which I

had no answer because I did not know what is a front roll, are you deaf? He inquired, no I said without using the prefix or suffix of Sir, and that acted like a petrol on fire, he literally hit the roof and soon I was front rolling, frog jumping on that dark semi broken wet area, I had lost sense of direction or the very reason of my acting on his words of commands, because all around were similar scenes and noises coming. He took me in this way to the fruit shop, and there he allowed me to stand up, I was covered in grass but not in mud, he told me his name is Mazhar and I have to use the prefix and suffix of Sir, he then treated me with a glass of milk shake, and as soon as I finished the glass, he again told me to start front rolling towards the Babur Company which was next to fruit shop, by this method he moved me and near the steps he told me to descend down through frog jumps and finally with same method of transport I was handed over by him to my Cadet Corporal Sajjad.

I don't recall how and when I was guided to a room, by that time my head was spinning due to constant front rolls and 'Gurkha' this last item was something which I have never seen in my life, one senior told me to get Gurkha and as I gave a blank look he ordered the next cadet to give me a demonstration which he did in a flash, its putting your head on floor and balancing your weight without touching your hands on ground, it has many derivations you can do spinning or all around

circle with your head as pivot. I had no room of myself and the bearer had left my luggage in one of the room so I went into that room and I see two cadets very cosily in their respective beds and my holdall was in between the two beds, one was Humayun and other was Pasha, one talked to me in rather friendly manner and other in a menacing voice and I was made Gurkha and then they both smiled and introduced themselves 'We are your course mates, but we are relegees' and I had no idea what is a releegee, which later I learn is the term used for those cadets who have failed to be promoted in the next term for any reason which ranges from poor discipline to academics or physical efficiency, now Pasha was a single releegee and Humayun was a double releegee. Releegee had a very imperial status among cadets and are treated with respect and reverence but certainly not by the establishment

I slept on floor using my holdall and own bedding , it was definitely the longest night of my life and I prayed that there should be no dawn but it came rather much before the dawn there was a howling outside and Humayun from his bed told me to get ready for the 'Fall In'. These were set of two rooms with a separate shower and toilet between two rooms and pair of basin on one side of wall, the other two occupants of side room ,well I did not saw them because I was through with rituals and shave in minutes. I wore my white shorts and

white shirt and white socks and shoes, the standard PT kit and came out of my room having no idea where to go and what to do. Out side were my platoon mates all standing in fall in front of corporal room. It is really difficult to explain how I felt or what were my feelings because these are the things you cannot express in words

In brief after few days the life took a pattern, in which I had my own room which I was sharing with GC{all cadets were and are called gentleman cadets hence GC}Suhail Sarwar, he was from Junior Cadet Battalion thus he was a JC{Junior Cadet} as well where as I was a Direct Intake or 'Lalla'.

Pakistan Military Academy was raised in 1947 after independence from the core structure of Officers training School of WW2 era ,initially it was all wooden barracks and had just one Battalion the 1st Pakistan Battalion Quaid Azam's own and the first commandant was Brigadier Ingall, in whose respect there is a hall called Ingall Hall, where all collective lectures and movies are screened. By 1982 PMA had two battalions the 1st and 2nd Pakistan, 1st was located on the left side and 2nd on right side with a main road 'PMA Road' as the main artery and the dividing boundary, from the entrance at main gate till the rear exit gate the total length is over two miles and a constant steep gradient climb. As you enter academy , the vast concrete parade ground is on left and on right is vacant open grassy area,

after 100 yards the main quarter guard on right along with kotes {where weapons are kept} then on both sides are residential blocks and cadets messes, they have almost football ground equal green belts and as you move up the road, after companies block comes HS{House of studies}in simple language the class rooms, all were wooden and semi wooden barracks and then comes the office area and Ingall Hall, officers mess and finally the officers residential area. All this area is lush green ,with flower beds, fruit trees. hedges and all is constructed on a mountain slope, thus uneven and rocky. The two battalion were organised into four companies in each. At a time there are four courses simultaneously undergoing training, thus 67 Long Course was the senior most,68 were the uppers,69 the Inters and mine 70th were the Juniors.

Duration of training was two years thus there was a passing out parade after every six months ,one in March and other in September.

Each course was further divided into platoons, the average strength of each course was around 300 GCs and normally after two years around 240 gets commissioned , rest are weeded out due to poor performance. Training pattern revolves around breaking the existing mental and physical structure of a cadet and instead to create an ideal officer and a gentleman. thus it involves strenuous physical exercises, drill, out door exercises, indoor

classes, weapon training, firing, map reading and inculcating leadership qualities and simultaneously probing human weaknesses .All this was done and achieved through a platoon commander who is an officer of captain or major rank and a drill staff. Thus my platoon had Major Farooq as platoon commander and Staff Irshad as the drill staff, all in all the whole course was divided into ten platoons with thirty cadets in each and obviously these ten platoons cannot be equally divided into eight companies of two battalions thus some companies had two platoons. The companies were as under

1st Pakistan Battalion {Khalid,Qasim,Tariq, and Saladin companies}

2nd Pakistan Battalion {Ghaznvi, Babur, Tipu and Aurangzeb companies}

The first two terms therefore first year of training is academic bias with constant physical ,drill and weapon training ,where as the last year is bias toward military subjects and field manoeuvres

The cadets were incorporated into the system ,in a way, that from third term they are given appointments, Corporals, they look after a platoon, then in final terms they are made sergeants, and crossbelts

appointments. Thus there was sports sergeant, there was company senior under officer, company junior under officer, company sergeant major and same pattern was in the battalion thus cadets were appointed battalion senior and junior under officers and battalion sergeant majors. There were only sixteen cadets in the whole academy who can put on cross belts and one out of them will be awarded the most coveted 'sword of honour' on the final day and naturally it was the dream of every cadet on entering the academy to win this coveted sword. Playing fields were open and equal for all.

Ragging is part of military academy, it gives the power to your senior to Rag you and there is no limit to it, the only limitation is that it should not hurt your dignity and self respect and these two words carry a whole range of debate in themselves, abuse to your family and beliefs are also out of bound but anything related to you is allowed, you can be called by any name and you can be tasked to do anything ranging from Gurkha on ice in shorts to crawling on concrete road, sky is the limit in this field and all kind of nasty and obnoxious words can be utilised and it should be remembered that all this has to be in English which in majority of the cases was not the mother tongue of cadets. Drill staff can also rag you but his ragging is different and they cannot use nasty or in simple words they cannot Bullshit you, they converse in Urdu language, yet they had the imagination to convey

their feelings towards you in a variety of way as it will be seen

Platoon commanders are above everything it was a simple time long saying 'After God Platoon Commander' they have all the power other than the power of giving birth over cadets,anything and everything,they soon become idols and ideals of cadets and cadets talk more about them and about drill sergeant than they do about their parents

Few words about the cadets,there were two categories of them ,one who have joined the Junior Cadet Battlion at the age of 16 and spend two years in this academy which was a mile away from the PMA and after two years they join main academy and parallel to them the direct intake cadets who are generally in age group of 17-19 and studied in civil colleges join in,thus there has to be a mark difference between these two ,where as the JC was well converse with drill,physical fitness and general norms of military life the DI was at loss in this field as they were totally blank about military life unless and other they come from military back ground ie father or brother serving in the army

The social background of cadets also vary,till 60s majority were coming from urban areas but by 80s the gap was nominal and Pakistan is a big country thus there cadets coming from all kinds of background,for instance

in any platoon of 30 cadets it will not be unusual to find one odd son of a general,two-three cadets of officers,few cadets of soldiers ,civil servants,business men and ten odd from rural areas who have never even seen a city or use a fork or knife in life or wore a trouser for that matter,majority were having strong religious background and in any case since the JC constitute almost fifty percent of cadets strength thus they were already well converse with eatin,dressing and other manners,DI on the other hand were more liberal and open minded as they have spend two years in college envoinments,in the end there was always one odd cadet who had been in airforce academy and transferred to army normally because of poor academics thus they were also old hand

In academics,the PMA offered two range of subjects Arts and Science bachelors ,study duration was one year for both,the teachers all belong to army education corps,which infact were masters in their relative subjects and joined army ,granted commission after six months of training ,therefore they were always taken lightly by the cadets,especially the JCs

Now with this back ground and information I take you back to mine getting out of the room,I saw the platoon standing infront of corporal room and we had to stand in three rows which naturally I was not aware off,there

were few looks at me and than Asif Changezi a JC gave me a dirt nasty look and with a finger indicated and said 'Fuck there' and there were few DIs also who said Changezi hold on, and then a complete silence all were present, I was already late by a week, the one cadet than made us stand attention and I just follow what others were doing, 'Shun position' was joining both feet and hands and being motionless other than breathing, cadet knocked the door and simultaneously gave the word of command 'Gurkha' and everyone got into that position, the corporal came out and simply said 'Fuck Off' and on this we all got up and ran downstairs, and than reported outside the room of our sports sergeant Asif Khattak, {he is brigadier now} his words of command from his window were 'ten rounds' which meant that we had to run around the company block for ten times which we did.

Naturally I was blank in all this proceedings and just followed the pack, I don't think there was any thought in my mind other than to keep on doing what others were doing, from this we moved to a basketball court which was located just across the road and it was at this time the pre dawn light came on horizon. The drill staff Irshad came, he was a tall slim soldier in his thirties and carried a drill cane in his hand and wore starched khaki with shinning shoes, I forgot to mention that I was the only

one wearing running shoes rest all were wearing ankle high black leather shoe with studs underneath

On that day I was also issued with the kit, and it was issued in a ground where all those cadets who reported with me were there, I met Wadi and Farrukh who were with me in ISSB there, the kit included two blankets, both red colour, three types of shoes, khaki dungrees pair, the complete field service marching order [FSMO] helmet, a wooden rifle, water bottle, satchel and many other small items, I took all this with the help of my bearer to the room, there was one bearer for every two rooms or for eight cadet, his name was miandad and he was a second WW2 veteran, who wasted no time in telling me that he had seen Rommel in Africa and more importantly the present platoon commander of mine was also his cadet, and I was under high impression of his credentials

The training routine was not tough but hectic and there was absolutely no time given for any thoughts to wander around, it was getting up at an hour before the dawn, rather to be more precise the academy especially juniors never sleep, there were fallins of corporal at say 0100 hours in PT kit and then ragging can last for an hour, then it can be sports sergeant fall in with blankets and so on, by this time we all new intakes had the proper military hair cut and our measurements were also taken by the tailor for stitching of one grey suit and one combination which consisted of a double blazer blue

colour four buttons and a grey trouser,alongwith one sherwani black colour ,white kameez shalwar and blue patrol ceremonial dress.The tailor Khan muhammad was a history and an encyclopedia in himself,he remembered all the numbers of all cadets past and present,it was unbelievable but true,{and I experienced it my self when I visited the academy after few years and he recalled my number 19814}.These shops the tailor,photographer and cobbler were situated behind the quarterguard in an old wooden barrack and yes we all were issued with standard PMA track suit of blue colour and PMA ties as well,later our was the first course which was issued with a khaki safari suit as well

I was amazed initially when I saw everyone wearing the same track suits and same kind of dresses,my mind standing in fallin couldnot grasp this similarity,only the senior most termers were allowed to put on the private dress yet it had to be a suit and none was allowed to come out of the room without a gown if he is wearing sleeping dress

Irrespective of the day programme it will start with the platoon fallin at the side road at the time given by the drill staff and it was always in darkness,it was getting cold and I had never worn shoes with nails underneath,some time our dress was dungaree with belt and beret and other time normally it was sports kit with nailed shoes,staff on his arrival will make us run and

‘shoot’ {a fast run} giving word of command Shoot from left and come from right and I will leave the first one to come, and he will never leave anyone because he will always find some fault in his running, to me and most of new intakes it was very difficult as we would invariably slip on the tar coal road with nails, and we lacked stamina apart from the fact that at least my ankles were swollen and I had blisters, but there was no remedy

Words cannot express the dedication of the drill staff in making us learn how to walk with left feet forward and right arm also simultaneously forward and marching on heels with stomach in chest out eyes looking at the horizon, he was the trainer and we were raw, he taught us how to lace up our shoes with eyelids always closed and lace hanging inside, he was never satisfied with our belt to him no matter how tight we buckle up it was still loose enough to allow a whole battalion to pass through it, his own bearing and dress was always perfect. In the beginning he started with words of command for attention and at ease, and he would expect us to bang our feet with such might that water should come out of the ground, it's a technique to bang the feet and it comes with experience and I in my inexperience would slam it full face on road and resultantly the whole shock would travel up ward causing immense pain, neither could I understand how can I move forward with rapid motion of my hands and

feet swinging and banging on heels,honestly in those days these were my major concerns and even in my dream I would be trying to solve this riddle,everything was new from tying up laces to wearing of beret and belt

Staff had also something at stake,after four weeks there was a saluting test of this junior most course in which every cadet has to give a demonstration of walking,halting ,turning and saluting .adjutant used to take the test ,only those cadets who will pass the test were given out pass on weekends to visit the city for few hours,more importantly after another four weeks there was a drill competition among all junior platoons in main drill square,in which a staff will march in the platoon and carry out drill movements,the winner gets a Drill cane which he then carry throughout the term till next competition and it was highly prestigious for a staff,thus he worked with a zeal and enthusiasm which is unparralled,he would threaten plead rag and work well before dawn and throughout the day with the platoon to make it competitive.

Thus early morning the whole PMA would reverberate with their words of command,echoing back from the nearby mountains,rain snow hail or sleet made no difference,if it is raining he will take us under a shed and made us practice stand ease or attention,while teaching drill they like dervishes of Rumi will get into a frenzied state,japing mantras of drill command and we

like human robot will just follow it, 'Move, stop, move, turn right, move, faster faster, this sahib don't disgrace your town, you cannot walk straight and you are thinking of becoming officer, move, halt, step mark, jaisay thay, dhoraay chaal, qadam maar , qadam maar,' and we cadets will soon get into a state of hyponotism where nothing else exists other than this. And this used to last for an hour and it was just a warm up, a ten minutes break and we will all run down to the either quarter guard to draw the Rifle G-3 for rifle drill or to the PT ground for almost two hours of PT

PT staff were as dedicated as drill staff and as mean and tough as any body on this god's earth. They will make us run run and run, making us 'Shoot' around the corners climb up the ropes and jump over wooden horses. Platoon Commanders would be there to observe us

The physical activity consisted primarily of doing Beams, Climbing ropes, crossing Horse and finally a mile and in between it was not unusual to see the whole platoon with their legs on a wall and hands down or carrying and running with 'PMA Cock' it was a cement oblong shaped heavy item, and thus named as pma cock by cadets. I was average in all yet mile had a fear on me, there were rounds of pologround to make one mile and there was no technique other than to run madly, the

military theory was that it is a test more of your will power than stamina

From PT ground we will run up,juniors are not allowed to walk they are supposed to run ,we will run to our Babur Company Mess and there the staff would be waiting for us and he will again make us drill for ten to fifteen minutes and will give just five minutes to consume the breakfast

It was another experience to consume breakfast,I recall the very first breakfast .we entered the mess,it was a big mess,wodeen barrack,it had a ante room,a billiard room a wash room ,a cloak room and a dinning room apart from the kitchen.as juniors we entered the mess and our tables were the last one,there were rows of four tables and a higher head table where senior and appointment holders used to sit,there was a military way of sitting,you have to take out the chair without making any noise and sit from left,floor was not carpeted,naturally there was one odd sound of chair wood hitting the floor,as soon as we sat and there were already two plates per cadet,having two fried eggs,butter,jam and four toasts and glass of milk,apart from cornflakes,I think I had only pour the milk into the flakes when the senior cadet roared 'juniors under the table' my platoon mate shuhail sarwar being a JC was quick and grab the four toasts before ducking under the table ,I followed him and he offered me a toast and aftera

minute the senior again roared ‘juniors ‘ you have thirty seconds ,consume the breakfast and vanish’

Time till lunch was spent in class rooms called HS where initially we were issued books and satchel,again only senior term is allowed to carry the satchel in their hand rest all have to sling it around their shoulder

After a Month life settled down to this routine of getting up early,drill,PT,running up,quick breakfast,classes,punishment,sports,evening prep,than ragging and gods knows at what time we slept.We will always move as a platoon,each week there was one cadet acting as senior gentleman cadet{SGC} it was his duty to make and present daily parade state of the platoon to platoon commander,which indicated the total strength,and the number of cadets who have reported sick and what was their disposal and any point from cadet,similarly the platoon commander will also write his remarks about any thing,ranging from Tell GC Pasha to see me,or platoon needs to pull up their socks,or I am not happy with your performance in PT.its not that we did not had direct contact with him ,we had period with him classified as platoon commander disposal almost every week and than there was ‘indoor mile’ which cadets refered to public speaking period normally every week, and this was the only thing in which I was good in pma, and you have to be good in something at least to

survive. Now when I look back I think the whole system was very fair and all it required was that cadet should come forward with any capability which is pronounced from others, may it be any sports, studies or debates or even honesty

Platoon, before going any further let me introduce the platoon, Pasha, Humayun, they both were relegees, suhail sarwar, suhail khan, suhail mahmood, babur, changezi, Khalid shahbaz, arshad, waqas, jawad, Zaid, Javed, Waseem, Iftikhar, Mussarat, Farhat, Imtiaz, Anwaar, Intisaar, Athar, Atif Riaz, Kabir, Sajid, Khalid, Trimzi

We all had our unique characteristics, like Javeed was always smiling and had been an artist, Babur had a deep voice and was a good singer, Changezi almost fought with each cadet of platoon, Zaid was a very good hockey player and always happy go type, Jawad was serious type, out of original lot, Intisar died in academy due to exhaustion in field exercise, Zaid died two years after getting commissioned in a motorbike accident, Arshad went through a mental depression, Changezi left army, Khalid Shahbaz became a colonel so did Waqas, Trimzi became a brigadier and so did Mussarat, our platoon commander Farooq Shoukat also retired as brigadier, but back to early days.

BSM, Battalion Sergeant Major, was the most dreadful name that I heard then, I had not seen him and neither did I know what it stands for but the way his name was whispered among the cadets was so full of horror, like BSM night is coming, BSM is going there, BSM said this, and soon I learnt what he stands for, in the first week end, it was announced that Thursday will be the BSM night, at nine I think after dinner we juniors stood in PT kit, we were 150 in numbers, it was a dark cold night with little light from the street pylons, there was fear in the night, with us inters were also standing but at a little distance away, the corporals were also there so were sergeants and company sergeant majors, and there was silence yes almost pin drop silence and it was broken by the voice of one CSM, 'juniors gurrkha,' you know you are lucky, today you will be fucked by the biggest c.k on this god's earth, it's so big that it will go through your ass and come out of your mouth and then wrap around your body' Hey you, that sucker in the third row, you have the cheeks to move your eye balls, I will take out that eyes and put my balls there... and similar bullshit went on, with each CSM giving a brief of what will happen to us and how. However there was no mention of any female relationship or any vernacular abuse. I never had heard this kind of abuse before, it is different to be abused in foreign language; it cannot put you in rage. JCs had been through this before but for DIs and especially for me it was absolutely a new thing and I

had doubts that whether its joke or serious, but when your head is on concrete cold road with your legs spread, you dare not take it lightly.

Mid term break was a well deserved affair, it was in December and every one just vanished from academy. It provides mental recreation if nothing else, the kind of treatment one gets from family and relatives makes all these hardships worth enduring. Journey back was a bleak affair, as soon as the mountains of Abbottabad became visible the heart started sinking and one wish for the fever or flu to take place but nothing happened even the mild fever which i had in the leave also vanished.

Days passed by slowly and gruelling. I was not good in drill and as such failed in my saluting test after which the cadets who have passed it were allowed to visit the city on weekends. In spare time which was rare my mind was tackling the issues of drill , which foot had to go forward and which hand to rise up and when all these had to come down was an enigma. Majority of cadets who cleared this test were naturally from JCB but still many of them also flung in it which was a matter of utter disgrace. These two words ‘grace’ and especially the ‘disgrace or disgracer’ have long term meaning for a cadet and also after becoming an officer this word haunts . There is no clear cut definition of what makes your act disgracer, it can be running away from punishment, refusing to do other cadets homework or sharing his

punishment, not making a bunk with platoon and so on all falls under the category of being disgracer. In true sense anything false is disgraceful conduct however in legal military terms it has another connotation.

Nature gave me an opportunity which i blew in the air just after the mid term. I had sent a card to the platoon commander for new year from Karachi, i felt good while on leave but when i reached back to the academy all kind of fears started coming into my mind as to waht is going to happen to me now . Major farooq Shaukat rather was very pleased with the acrd and tahnked me in the class and this is how trouble started , it was conveyed to the seniors nad same night Cadet Mukararm Ali shah of third term gave a proper ragging to me over this. Next there was a debate of inter company in which i also gave my name because i have been part of my school team. Cadet Ahmed hayat was also in the same term and we both happened to be the school fellow and had atken part in the competition in 1979 travelling from Karachi to peshaawr alongwith other fellow Salman Habib. Haayt's afther was a general in the army, presently not only he but his two elder brother are also generals in army, an excellent family with very military like culture. Anyeawy comig back to the debates, i was given excuse for morning fall in and this was way too much for the JC's to see a direct intake having such luxury thus my room mate Suhail Sarwar

had no other reason but to fume first day at morning but next day he woke me up to offer my prayers , i was startled as what to do, neither i could complain to any one on this issue which lingered on for few days , i told the platoon mates and half were in favour of him and other half supported my stance of enjoying the sleep. One morning i was fed up and walked towards the platoon commander's office to lodge the complaint as in my opinion the religion was a private affair but lost my heart midway and came back; i was not sure of platoon commander's reaction.

Second Term

Passing a term is easy and difficult in both senses, apparently there is nothing special in just attending and bearing physical exertion or torture. But there are certain grading involved in this mechanism. You have to pass the physical examination which had five tests each carrying ten marks. Climbing of rope, Jumping over a wooden horse beams. five mile with white canvas shoes and finally the one mile test. Each had its timings to get minimum of five marks which were the passing marks. There were cadets who got fifty marks as well like Wahab, Wadi bin Hanif, Sultan, Zarrar but very few thus they were certainly the darling of the platoon commanders . There were other who got

49 marks. Getting full marks are possible in running tests and in rope also in which one has to climb up to a certain height with the use of arms and legs but clearing of wooden horse depends upon the examiner , he may give ten marks. Among all of these majority of cadets were not good in all the tests . In beams the body posture had to be correct showing the strength of the arms , ten beams and you get ten marks but to pass it one has to perform five beams. Mile was sensational like the 'Chariots of Fire' it has to be done within five minutes and thirty seconds. It was the ultimate test of stamina, endurance and above all will power. The Polo ground the venue, two complete chakkars of it complete one mile.

The very first time i ran i failed and remained in this phase for many weeks even at the end i was marginal getting six marks; i never managed more than eight in my duration of training at PMA. It is a great achievement. Sometimes it was reflected in the weekly training programme which was placed in every living building but even for many including myself it was revelation after many surprises. It will create nightmares, mind wafting to it on and off. In the morning the bowls will churn and urge to remain sitting on the commode. On cold freezing days when the early mist is still covering the monotonous valley, the platoons of cadets wearing all white, warming up . Staff will make you run wild around the lone hut the way a equestrian warms up

his horses . There is a technique in running but in the end it is all in brain and legs. The platoon would gather haphazardly behind the white line. Nothing in mind just to run and run and off you go . You run with all your strength there is nothing conserving your energy or any plan just run and keep on running , either you will die or it will end soon. Eyes blank, nothing is seen other than the white shoes running, stepping and hoping , the snarls of other cadets , words of encouragement from all and you are doing same but then even this turns into whispers. Polo ground is not circular, we had started from the western end , facing the green fields in front with city of Abbottabad outskirts on your right. I used to think of my mother while running and motivated myself to run for her sake that would give some strength, then face of my old school fellow Reena would come up, she was the first girl whom i wrote a love letter in class four and got the hell of beating from the teacher Hassan Ali; because she had placed the same letter to him. I had a kind of one way love affair with her{ same story with all other cadets} and she became my mental escape route and it started working better than thinking about mother.

The last chakkkar was the one when i required these mental tonics to keep running, by this time GC Humayun Pasha, Arshad, Khalid, Farhat, Arthur, were way ahead. Zaid, Mussarat,Jawwad, Javed,around me, Baabr , Waseem behind. This mental calculation gives

some hope and another burst of energy, now nothing else but the empty space and the last turn. This was tremendous, now the end is near, soon this agony will be over, but if i afil? And another mental whip; there is no such thing as 'stepping' , just run and finally the sound of staff at the end shouting Seven which means if you cross the line you will get seven marks. Platoon commander was the biggest morale booster, his smile or a single word of Buck Up can do miracles. Finally it comes to end, everyone just feeling fresh, especially after the week end.

Indoor Mile

There was another side of training , the academics. A cadet has to pass the papers and under such circumstances study is the last thing which comes to mind but it has to be done. Papers were easy , marking liberal but there is limit and thus many cadets despite having excellent physical record fail to be promoted to next term and similarly non matter how good you arte in studies you have to pass the physical examination. In both cases the platoon commanders, staff and your seniors including your own platoon goes to last limit in helping you to pass but again there are limits. The most serious crime in academy is cheating; simply unforgiveable. Thus none cheats and those who try to do

it were not only thrown out of academy but given civil imprisonment.

Public speaking was termed as the indoor mile and here i was as comfortable as a horse on a mile track. Majority of cadets had the similar feelings towards it which we or i had towards the mile test. After the first public speaking , in which the platoon commanders gives you a topic and you have to get on the rostrum , face the class and express your self. It has certain norms , it ahs to be in English and eye contact was paramount; that was the whole purpose. Majority of cadets from junior cadet battalion were poor in it , Shahbaz would blink, Sarwar would stummer, suhail would gulp , and so on . I was the best among them in this and as such all of a sudden i realised my importance and so did other cadets. Now they would come to my room to get the draft for public speaking. All in all every cadet has some hidden qualities and thus a balance of interest develop. In academy a cadet is respected for what he is and not what his aft6her is. You have to be good , extraordinary good in something to get respect from your colleagues. Wadi bin Hanif is one such cadet who topped the physical tests and won the coveted paratrooper trophy.

There was one cadet who was almost perfect, gentle man Cadet Javed, he was perfect in every sense, physically, morally, in studies, in manner, in personality. He won the coveted Sword of honour of my course, join

Baluch regiment and laid his life for motherland at Siachen while still in his prime, he was just promoted a captain.

Sargodha Days

After passing out parade on 5th September 1984 I had about ten days of leave before I put on an officers uniform for the first time in my life and those days passed quickly yet I enjoyed every moment of them as all my other course mates must have. I kept on pending that demi official letter which I was supposed to write to my commanding officer informing him of my arrival and how much lucky I am to be posted in this regiment, the major reason of this delay was the fact that I never wanted to join this regiment ,my heart was in infantry and I felt rather depressed but I heard and second lieutenants hears too much, that you can change your regiments within first six months or so ,however what I failed to hear was the fact and rule that as a second lieutenant you require a report from your commanding officer about your suitability and further retention in army within first six months, I don't remember exactly whether I wrote that letter or not but I do remember that first night in regiment as a second lieutenant.

I got the flying coach from Lahore for Sargodha, I have never been to this town before, however as a child I have read war books on 1965 Pakistan-India war and how own airforce jets used to operate from this town, it was the major target of Indian air force as well and this city after the war was decorated with the title of 'City of Falcons' another myth about this city and especially about its runways was regarding their being underground, strange but it was a strong myth especially in school days

Journey took over six hours and finally I saw Kirana Hills and myth about underground runways became clear, it was the close proximity of city to these hills that shaped that image, enroute I passed through another historic town, 'Rabwah' it became famous or notorious in 1974 when students in a train were beaten here and that ultimately led to the whole community of Qadianis being declared as non muslims, the stories that started circulating in predominantly Muslim newspapers about Rabwah generally created an impression of a town which is totally immoral and where this sect has made a hell and heaven on miniature scale. When the coach passed through this town an hour short of Sargodha it was an ordinary looking small plain town with broken roads, I made a mental note of visiting this town on first opportunity

Since I had not at least written any time of my arrival to my commanding officer thus when I got down from the coach at Sargodha and got a rickshaw and told him to take me to the cantonment and his reply Which cantonment? Really put me in a different state of mind. How many cantonments are here, I inquired, well there is an air force cantonment and then there is one across the canal

Since my regiment was an air defence regiment therefore I made a logical conclusion that it must and should be in air force area, an hour later rickshaw dropped me in the cantonment which was across the canal and he was running short of petrol as well. I stood alone with my two bags at the corner of a block and walked towards the room from where light was coming, it was not that late just after dusk, I knocked the door and a soldier opened the door and I walk in and met the officer who was lying on the bed, he was Lieutenant Samee Khan, he inquired about myself ,ordered tea and admonished me for not informing them in time so they could have arranged a proper reception for me and I felt guilty for my omission

As we were talking the door opened .room had three doors two in opposite direction ,one leading to the lawn from which I came and other to a corridor and third leading to the washroom and then to adjoining room, incomer was Major Zaheeruddin Bob Babur, and he was

in sports kit and after some time came few more officers ,including my cousin Lieutenant Salik Cheema. Major Bob was happy in narrating the game which he had just lost to the commander and how much commander has appreciated his racket, the two other officers over cup of tea kept agreeing with Bob and I was the only one who was just listening ,in any case it is said a ‘second lieutenant is supposed to listen and not to speak’. After appreciating Bobs tennis skills the officers inquired about the examination paper which I gathered was to be held tomorrow and Bob after this much of appreciation could not resist and gave them few tips and shortly they all left

I was mentally thinking about the room and general environments, I found them very frank among each other and I had no idea how officers interact among each other, because till that time I had seen the platoon commanders in academy and that too from a distance and always in a formal way. always in tie and always speaking English ,we all cadets were advised during our final days in academy ,not to expect this kind of standards in rest of army and to be practical because what you have seen here in academy is ideal

There is a tradition in army regarding first day of second lieutenants, they are made fool, one of the regimental officer acts as a batman to him and generally takes money and carry out practical jokes with the new

arrival who in any case has no idea of army, but every cadet knew about this and so did i

A batman came and Lt Samee introduced him to me 'aamir this is kala , he is your batman' I just nodded and then Samee khan gave a long lecture to Kala regarding his duties and warned him that if there is any complaint than he will be taken to the task, Samee also told Kala not to smoke my cigarettes or wear my clothes or use my shaving kit. I really felt grateful to Samee for so kind and considerate

Kala then took my luggage from this room to next and after some time came and announced that he needs money to buy the bucket, polish and so many other things, I instinct looked towards Samee and he after scrutinising the list nodded and said 'aamir its okay, give him money' and I did and kala kept on increasing the items, finally he brought certain things and I moved to other room and kala started polishing my shoes and kept on talking as well about the quality of my shoes leather and finally I gave him a shut up call, he in the end took my uniform for getting it pressed and I relax on my bed and finally went to sleep without even taking my dinner

Next day I was the first one to get up and get ready ,the excitement and joy of wearing the uniform was too much

I had the starched khaki, peak cap. Officers stick and black DMS shoes, my mind was full of questions and doubts ,how to reply the salute, how to salute the seniors if they are more than two and so on,I had my breakfast in mess and mess waiters after serving duly brought a chit which I signed it ,it was a money chit which they can go and get it from canteen,{waiter explained me all this},on that first day the regiment was preparing for some study period and I like lamb just followed Lt Samee khan, where ever he went I just followed him and he in between would utter some words which were not particularly addressed to me. other seniors and I meant everyone as I was the junior most also had a look at me, one Lieutenant Ghulam Ali who was from the same company as I was in PMA gave me few hard words in his English which by and large was not much improved from the academy days but devoid of academy colour. Lieutenant Colonel Umar had a brief look at me but did not uttered any thing and neither shook my hand, in this manner the time passed, I saw the soldiers and JCO's and NCO's how they interacts with officer how they move, in acdemy we all cadets had the interaction with them but that was where they wee on the giving end ,it was frank they were talking in Punjabi or Urdu with the officers and among themselves only in Punjabi, they would come and shake hand with me ,especially the JCOs and I had no idea as how to interact. The whole military life was different from what I had

dream and by the end of the day I was more convinced that I must change my arm to infantry. I had the lunch in the Mess.

As I entered the mess there was a cloak room on the right side where one has to take off his cap and also the belt and then wash your hands and entered the main hall, I was expecting the picture of the Quaid and it was there and as per the custom I raised my heels as a mark of respect and salute. I took my seat on the table, few other lieutenants were there from other regiments and they said some word as how was your day and so on, I still just observed the procedures still not sure as how to order the food, the officers were being served and soon the waiter brought the curry dishes, the pattern was that he would stand on my left and offered the dish from which I will take few spoons and then other waiter would forward the other dish which if I am not wrong was potato cutlets and finally he would bring the chappatis. the glass and jug of water was already on the table but that has to be filled by the waiter, I by and large remained partially hungry for the reason that I was not sure how to get the second serving or what to do, I generally was in the mood to simply get up and rush back to my room to smoke, which I did.

I came back to my room still lost, I remained seated on a chair and I think I did not changed the uniform till late when I changed in sports kit but was

told by Samee khan that due to study period there are no games so u can sleep but we have to be at the hall to prepare the study period. I followed them almost all the officers were in sports kit which was any thing but not in white colour, what was my role in that study period? Nothing just stood there and if some said ok take seat then sit down as soon some other senior would enter I would get up, I think I once even half got up on the approach of one JCO also, it took me some time to notice the red ribbon on the rank shoulder of the jco. I did not went for dinner as I remained in my room because my clothes were not ironed and that batman was not seen since last night and I was now worried as to who will press my this uniform luckily Samee khans batman did the same without my knowledge, I slept early ,this was my first day in the regiment.

Next day followed the same routine and it remained like this for over a week, in between my batman turned out to be Lieutenant Mushtaq whom in normal circumstances I might had taken for batman in any case, I came to know that he is from Officer Training School ,somehow this was something which we all long courses were too good in picking up before anything else in the regiment.

This OTS was a parallel thing running with Military academy ,these officers were given short service commission as they had a training of only one year as to

two years of PMA, thus they would report to the units earlier than the regular officers who in turn were given ante date seniority over these officers. My course which passed in September 1984 was given seniority to of almost two years ,Now this was very tricky because in the last days of PMA the majority of discussions among the cadets was revolving around this phenomena how to counter this OTS and I am sure the same must be going through these OTS officers in how to tackle these incoming officers, I remained witness and had to solve many delicate issues of lieutenants privileges in coming years. I had few uncomfortable days with Lt Mushtaq because I thought I was senior despite his being a lieutenant and my being a second lieutenant ,it indicates how strong was the passion but it was my fault and later I said sorry to him. As per the tradition the amount which Mushtaq had been able to get out of me was for a party in which I was now officially accepted as the one of the clan member.

My first official task was to make sure that the utensils which were there for the study period are clean and I was shocked when the adjutant said this ,the reason was very simple it look below the dignity and no one in PMA had trained me for this now after a quarter of century the fact is that there was not much of a work in the regiment thus to keep a new comer busy any work was deemed suitable and later in the years this became a

pattern that officers especially the junior ones were always kept busy in these works, in old days the officers had the same pattern but then there were horses thus a new comer would be kept busy in such activities but now there was nothing of that sort, I promptly acted upon the orders ,I just stood on one side and watched the mess staff polishing the silver spoons and then had a look at them. needless to say this further kindled my desire to join infantry and as such i was taking the things in a transition .

After the study period the life to some extent became normal. In the morning PT in which I as a second lieutenant was the only one dressed in white sports kit which was white shirt half sleeves, white shorts and white shoes with white socks, other officers wore different coloured track suits, troops wore khaki trouser with white vest ,in winter it was their woollen jersey ,the JCOs wore proper white dress which was white trousers and polo shirt ,the troops were issued with PT shoes which were canvas khaki .as a second lieutenant I was expected to lead the troops in PT, on the first day I was nervous, it requires guts to stand in front of over four hundred men whom only very few are younger than you, the senior officers encouraged me to lead and PT was a simple affair. Adjutant took the parade and I had no idea how it was being done, the SM gave the parade state ,all the officers were on parade

which meant that they stood on one side ,adjutant made the parade hoshiar {and since we four officers were junior to him thus we stood attention ,in any case I had to be} and gave the parade state to the senior major who was second in command ,what they spoke in between I had no idea, but later in the years when I myself gave the parade state and took the parade state ,the conversation is a tactics in which the senior just point out to any one thing thus making the junior felt on his toes. After this the adjutant shouted officers saf choor,sahib parade laay jao{SM take over} and SM then ordered the regiment to turn right, by this time I was in front of the regiment and started running, it was not much of running around a mile and then some exercises which in my opinion were too easy, it all lasted for well over half an hour, honestly I was disappointed with the standard of PT.

I was later told after few weeks by the 2!C to slow down the pace which I failed to comprehend at that time but with experience I understood his wisdom. I as officer or for that matter all other officers after PT had over an hour to take bath with warm water and then take break fast but with troops it was difficult ball and game, they had limited washrooms and as such they could not afford the same luxury which I could afford, then they had to spend the rest of the day till late at night in physical exertion of one or other kind, last but not the least was the age grouping of the troops, I was nineteen

at that time and it is weird to expect a soldier of over forty to match that youth, I myself when reached that age group understood my early days actions.

SWEEPER

Another very important vital yet very silent and obedient character of the army. Almost every Pakistani is aware of the sweepers we see than from our childhood in one way or the other invariably they all were either Hindu or Christian. In army all of them are Christians. Every unit is entitled depending upon the size of the unit; invariably in every unit either a mess waiter or a maali is enrolled in their place. There are few who are non combatants enrolled (NCEI) and the other sweeper would be enrolled as a combatant. Lately Muslims are also authorized to be enrolled as sweeper in Skardu where there is no Christian at all. A lively character by nature he is the most jolly person in the unit always dressed in latest fashion, wears latest trendy cloths which are cheap imitation of real stuff.. The invariably own a bicycle and keep it as good as an officer keeps his motor bike or car. These sweepers certainly achieve a social status among their own community when they own a bicycle.

Sweeper do have gifted patience, they are always the first suspect in any theft

taking place in home, house or in bachelor quarters and in my quarter of century I do not recall even once being confirmed about this. These sweepers thus are very honest because they know the implications of being otherwise. They are at the lowest most ladder both sociality and economically. Their living quarters are always in the remote part of the cantonment seldom visited by any one. {visit to their quarters is now bit more frequent by regimental officers}. Nothing is hidden from them , they know an officer from his first day, they sweep his room ,washroom and as such are privy to all that takes place there. They find hidden hashish, magazines and all that stuff which is hidden from normal eye.

It was in Sargodha after one year of service that I physically visited their living are. There was a road parallel to the canal, void of any light and there was their shanty town the accommodation was cemented but it was difficult to stand there because of stench. Area was infested by all kind of germs and smell. There were good about 20 add sweeper the total strength of the garrison, their women, children and elders were all living together. I have seen similar discretion in Punjab village where Christians have separate area.

In Army sweepers day start early in the morning, he sweeps the living quarter of the troops clean their latrines and there are always around

few hundred men using a dozen toilets and most of the them are choked, than he sweeps the offices, quarter guard, and accomplishes all this before the day begins at 0730 hour, After an hour he moves to the married officer houses. By law of British era only the commanding officer is authorised a sweeper; all other officers makes to makes own arrangements. I came to know this rule in 2004 when my friend Brigadier Tariq Saeed was in command and he narrated how he put an officer on mat who used to be citing the rules for every job given to him; Tariq then enforced this ruling and everything becomes smooth in the regiment. Hard fact is that no officer can live without a sweeper especially the married because in our culture the lady wives feel low in sweeping the veranda. Thus every officer pays for the services of regiment sweeper (CO also pays). However it is only the commanding officer where a sweeper by law will work all day; at all other houses a sweeper spends half our hours to an hour. This is where the story starts because every officer {married} wants to have the sweeper at certain time which is not possible. Bachelor quarters normally takes fifteen minutes to sweep.

. It was only after getting married that I started appreciating the quality of patience in a sweeper. Depending upon the mood of the lady wife. It was in Quetta in 1996 that I noticed the joyful aspect of sweepers life especially on Sunday. The church

in Quetta is almost in the mid of containment. The sweepers would put on new colourful clothes, well oiled hair, polished bicycles, with their wives and children equally dressed up, two children on the front rod of bicycle, wife on the carriage holding one child in her arms and other in her womb. They would bicycle in group , chatting and laughing ; without any exception all are Punjabi and speaks only Punjabi with typical accent.

The sweeper better half are all dark colour, and they keep bearing child after child. There were many who were serious in getting their children educated in one instance a sweeper send his daughter for medical study also. They all are in debt of one kind or the other they normally takes the loan from the regiment fund. Very seldom they borrow money from officers but if he has confidence in you he will ask for it and returns too but majority of officers do forgo their loans , normally after the first instalment.

They are entitled to leave like other soldiers but their leave is always approved by lady wives in one way or the other no lady wife likes to change the sweeper. Invariably the leave of sweeper working in commanding officer's house is approved by the lady wife. Sweepers are controlled by quarter master in the unit.

In field environment sweeper is the most important person. Every officer has a tent to himself and its common for two officer to share an tent. Behind this living tent is a small tent with a thunder box to attend the call of nature. It's a wooden box with enamel bowl fitted in the centre. The sweeper has to take it out clean it and again place it. Thus in the field one finds sweeper sitting behind these forty pounder tents. It is not unusual for an officer to find the sweeper poking his head while the officer is still busy. Till mid seventies majority of army houses were fitted with these thunder boxes, western sewerage system for instance was introduced in army aviation mess in 1975. This is the reason why only a commanding officer was authorised to have the sweeper present in this house all the time.

In late seventies sweeper also gained importance for alcohol after it was banned in the army. Only these sweepers had the permit to buy the alcohol at government rates. But majority of them are so poor that they seldom can afford this luxury; X-mas is an exception thus their permits were always misused. Majority of the sweepers are in habit of charas smoking which is cheap and keep the minds cool as well..

Within a unit their utensils are kept separate , they do not consume their food with the rest of the regiment. In x-max they are given holiday and

box of sweets or cash. Also they are always given cash awards in every regimental function after all they keep the regiment clean of all those bones consumed by over a thousand men and thrown carelessly all around. But one develops a very strong bond with these sweepers and they are the first one to be recalled whenever old officers most.

I had the best of time with them, I found them willing and happy in all shades of life, seldom I have seen him gloomy. Faces of so many sweepers are coming to mind. The sweeper normally has his own broom which he has altered by adding a bit of colour to the handle. When they come for sweeping of officers' accommodation then they take the broom provided by officers. There are two kinds of broom, one is hard and other soft. Soft one is meant for sweeping of mild dirt inside the rooms and hard one for hard work. Then there is issue of Phenyl, Vim, cloth for poocha. Reason for my friendship with sweepers were many fold, one being careless I had to trust him to find everything which I misplaced and to hand over to me without informing my wife. Secondly in my socialist view I did not keep a batman after marriage thus I was relying more on sweeper. He would help me in packing on posting, unpack it, find packing material, help me in moving of furniture and so on. My wife was also more comfortable with sweepers than the army soldier in the house.

These sweepers have many talents , some of them were and are outstanding players of football and cricket and plays for regimental team. They are integral part of any and every regimental drama party and they are good singers. They create life in field by singing at night. Normally the troops keep a distance with them but in sports when the regiment wins then these sweepers{players} are taken on shoulders by the hard liner havildar also. Sports thus provide the bridge. I have no hesitation in writing that in all these years, army has started treating them well. The church is white washed , officers and commanding officer attend the tea break there on Christmas. What about the wives of sweepers ? they do not sit idle, they also work, the whole family works in one way or the other. These sweepresses works in military hospitals but they are not employed in army units for the fear of having a scandal. Some of them are pretty and in any case the army soldier has its own datum line of beauty. Well i have heard few scandals involving the sweepresses and officers but lets keep the secret. These scandals usually surface when the officers were caught red handed by the lady wives.

Presentation

Presentation in its literal meaning is putting up something in an orderly manner and in army it has been

taken to new heights. I gave the very first presentation in my officer weapon course at Kharian in 1984 and i found it nothing different from a public speaking yet a presentation has many segments the most important being the introduction and then main body finally recommendations and conclusion, however as a thumb rule the officers concentrate only on the introduction and conclusion as it has been passed down through the seniors that a senior officer only reads these two segments, this is what i learnt in my initial years and it works not all the time but most of the time. The very first presentation that i saw was in my own regiment on the very first day of my reporting there in September 1984,all the officers were busy in a hall, by busy i mean they were talking to each other or passing orders to have chairs here or there because in reality the only person who actually was working was the havildar making and amending slides which were plastic in nature and had to be displayed on a wall with the help of a view graph, I also learnt that a good tea break is the core of a good presentation and that requires a lot of coordination like at what time the hot items have to be brought in from the mess and in what order but the menu of a tea break is a high task and in my youth days it was the domain of very senior officers and we the juniors were only to learn from their wisdom. The one bite patties and pastries were introduced in army in late eighties and were a great hit.

A presentation starts with a theme and that is normally given by the higher head quarters, presentations can be classified in many categories ,one category is which is given by a student in a school of instruction and this also vary with the level of institution and the course. In early days the slides were the paramount means although charts were also used but by 1984 they were bit old and displays the lack of interest of the student thus slides have to be made and who makes these slides none but the TA havildar or an officer with a very good handwriting, the slides were of a regular page size on which key points were written in a drawing ink by using the writing set which were there in every regiment as part of private property the soluble markers were something new at that time and were not available in small stations.

Let me just go back to the time of that course and i recall that one of my course mate Lieutenant Sultan Maqsood had a good presentation in terms of the slides and that set the pace of the course, the reason being that his elder brother was already in the army and he knew how to make the presentations which as i stated earlier revolves around the TA havildar, for the others we had to find such a person and it was not easy , moving on in the regiment when i was the adjutant i had to make one such presentation, my commanding officer guided me about the photo slides, which were rare in those days yet

very powerful in terms of conveying the contents, it revolves around taking pictures of actual things or from the magazines on photo slides mode of the normal roll yet the roll at that time was developed only either at Agfa Laboratory at Karachi or at Rawalpindi ,in fact I believe it was only done at Karachi and then the pictures can be displayed on a special viewgraph which were available in brigades even officers used to have them as personal property. Thus i went to Pakistan Air Force Base Sargodha for this purpose and it was here that I met Flight Lieutenant Tahir Farooq which later turned into a life long friendship, I also went to Karachi at my own expense for the developing of these slides and another episode took place there which I think i can narrate. After the development of the slides at Defence Authority site of the laboratory i was riding a motor bicycle which i had borrowed from an officer doing the course at Ack Ack School, around midnight i decided to visit my old class fellow Farruk Shahzad who was living at Azizabad; when close to the roundabout i was checked by the local police and on disclosing my identity they took me to the police station and very narrowly i managed to come out without suffering any injuries, it was unusual and next day i informed my relative Lieutenant Colonel Bashir Ahmed also in the school about the incident and he got excited and informed the higher headquarters about this and also updated about the back ground, a day earlier the students of the school had beaten up an police person for

some reason and this was the reaction of that. It was not unusual in those days {1985 onwards} of physical clashes between the army aviation officers and police personals and it will not be out of place to cite that the fall out of Junejo's government had one such clash as one of the reason, it took place in Rawalpindi .

Reverting back to the presentations there was another presentation at Sargodha which the brigade commander gave to the Vice chief of army staff General Khalid Mahmood Arif, it was the biggest in terms of the rank and as such for many weeks prior to it was the talk of the mess. In the field the presentation which were termed as briefing were given on the charts, there seems to be a hairline difference between the presentation and the briefing and later on with the years passing by it was not possible to draw a difference but at that time charts and the slides were the difference.

Nights would be spent in the regiment on preparations for the presentation, Naib Subedar Abid was our TA and as such responsible for making the slides and the charts, he was of a frail body and his room would be full of smoke of cigarettes and litres of tea would be consumed in making a single presentation, the irony was that if a single mistake has been made by him in writing on the slide then the remedy was to rectify it by using a blade over the word and then powdering it to cover the scratch. There were another type of slides as

well which were called photo slides they came in late eighties, in this a page of presentation typed on an electronic type writer would be copied through a photo copier and the problem of mistake was removed, however electronic type writers were available only at brigade level and also these slides were not available in small cantonments. It is not an exaggeration that officers posted in Kashmir would come all the way down to Rawalpindi to make slides for the presentations. I had a use of these slides and electronic type writer at Gujranwala when my course mate Captain Khalid Shahbaz was the grade three officer in the armoured brigade there.

In the presentation party apart from the officers actually delivering the script the role of view graph operator also an officer was very important as it was his duty to synchronise the whole operation of the slides movement in relation with the script, the slides at times numbering over fifty would be placed next to him and he had to keep his pace with the speaker, today it looks very trivial in nature but it was gigantic task for the reason that every regiment wanted to excel in this art and some of the key features were that speaker should not have an eye contact with the operator and it should work in a clock wise manner that was the beauty or the wastage of time and energy. Words about viewgraphs also, we had our first interaction with them at the military academy

where one viewgraph was always placed in each class room, it had a bulb which definitely had a life but as cadets we had no knowledge of how the things are procured and kept in army , it was in regiments that i came to know that it had a life and is expensive to replace as such they were never used for the purpose for which they were issued by the training directorate and always kept for the presentations of the commanding officer; yet the fear of its bulb failing at that moment as part of Murphy Law required another viewgraph as stand by, a rehearsal of replacing the viewgraph on actual day was also carried out. A presentation also apart from slides was also bound to have a hard copy of the script to be placed in front of the visiting commander and what a pain it used to be , the script would very seldom be finalised at least forty eight before the appointed hour and as such the last twenty four hours in any regiment would be more or less like the ‘chand raat’ when final touches would be given to the script and the place itself. It had to be binded but then the question of whether to ‘ring bind’ it or ‘clip bind’ would take many a sessions, at times the ring binding would have been in a wrong way and found only at the last moment.

Another very important aspect that was part of the presentation culture was the offering of cold drinks to the visiting officer, it looks odd but it was important to pin point at what time and which cold drink is to be

offered ,generally in the initial years a well dressed waiter would walk in carrying a tray in which water, coca cola and an orange juice would be placed and he would place it in front of the visiting officer and then hold on; it is not finished yet, at another appropriate time say after ten minutes he would walk in again carrying tea, green tea and coffee and coffee would of two types beaten and black. In reality the regiment would check in with the staff officers of the visiting officer about his preferences , there were numerous letters later issued from the higher headquarters to simplify the issues which in reality were not an issue but a special breed of officers were busy all the time in evolving new means to become the blue eyed boys of the commanders and presentations were one such means.

These presentations were quite useful in the intellectual grooming of the officer but sadly very rarely a genuine effort and research was made to get the data for dissemination, for most part the traditional ‘Chappha’ the old print was used, a military presentation was tailored to the liking of the commander and seldom based upon the out come of the study it self. English remained the standard and official language of the army however it is also a fact that all officers do not come from the same educational or social back ground moreover the accent of an individual is an individual thing and it cannot be changed and neither it should be,

the officers belonging to Lahore or Kashmir have distinct pronunciation features this issue becomes paramount in presentation at higher level, I have seen many and been part of many presentation where the English of the junior officers was much better than the senior and yet they had to adjust to the level of the senior, many officers were labelled with this stigma that their English is better than their commanding officer, in my case it was my commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Sarwar who improved my English by highlighting the use of tenses which i am sure still requires a lot of improvement.

One good presentation which i recall is the one which I prepared in 3 Army Aviation Squadron in 1993 it was about the Indian army aviation and there was no chappa of that, i got the help of the intelligence directorate and above all went through the Indian army's news letter SainaK Samachar which were available in the station library and through that i build up the case and data ,the findings were very interesting ,own intelligence directorate had given a certain number of pilots available in every squadron basing simply upon that apart from the crew of two pilots in each gun ship helicopter the Indians are maintaining a stand by pilot also and this calculation was spread over the entire Indian army aviation there by a number in excess of over 600 were marked as the pilots, in reality it was not more

than 200 hundreds including pilots posted on staff appointments. This is one example of a presentation giving the desired results and there were many more yet all were distracted by the culture of presentations.

Computers did not make the matter better rather it made it more cumbersome as now the changes could be incorporated at the last minute as well and these changes were nothing more than the colour and how the slides will appear and fade, the movies could be added as well, the spell check became easy but it had its own drawbacks as in certain cases computer would pass the words of dubious nature as well, printing became easy but again in the initial days of mid nineties the laser printers were only available in higher headquarters and ink dot at regiment level.

Mess Havildar

Mess is an institution , it is the home of bachelors in army, it is not like a hotel or cafeteria. With passage of time life has change but some of the mess life can be still seen and feel about. Excerpt from the forthcoming book ‘ Not the Whole Truth, twenty five years in Pakistan Army 1982-2007’.
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Mess havildar is the most vulnerable and most powerful appointment in the army depending upon from which angle you perceive him. If you are living in a BOQ and need food in your room or if you are dinning in another regiment's mess only then you can fully comprehend his power or blessings. He can make food available after the parade times, can open the ladies room without asking a question, can make the services of mess waiters available for you, can give you the shed to park your car, he can enhance your status, or put it into dust in front of your potential in laws or course mates. He can virtually derail your promising and brilliant career with his mid of the night weeping call on the commanding officer residence with sordid tale of your guests misbehaviour and so on. On the other hand in good ole days when there were no credit cards or ATM he was the solution to all financial dilemmas of a subaltern.

My first interaction with the powers of mess havildar took place in winter of 1986 when I was in Rawalpindi living in ACK ACK mess. The mess havildar was Maqbool of 95 LAA. Captain Rizwan was also from the same unit once he visited us and we ran short of money very conveniently he called Maqbool and requested for money which Maqbool give him without a frown. As per the mess rules, a mess havildar can give odd money to any officer but it is his

discretion I was not aware of this rule or tradition but from that day onwards it became our routine {myself, Captain Salik and Captain Rizwan} to have the money from Maqbool, usually the amount was enough to buy petrol etc as for all other items the payment was made through the Maqbool and he was entering the amount in our mess bills. A stage came when Maqbool the moment he saw us will put the hand in his pocket and then a time came when he would request us to arrange the money from some where or at least wait for a day as he had only enough amount to cook the food .

In Sargodha my unit 58 MAA was running the station mess, and we had the best of time there. We can order any dish to be made or to get the tv room open till late or get the mess VCR to our room or to get the ladies room opened at odd times or even sleep in the VVIP room if it is vacant all courtesy of mess havildar.

As a subaltern one is highly rigid in the enforcement of rules. The rules demand that mess havildar be present at food times in uniform. But with passage of time one learns to live in a bit compromising state where you start over looking the rules. This is how it all started, as a subaltern not only me but others would be properly dressed and take our dinner or lunch in the mess and that's it, it looks simple but it is not, soon I discovered that since the mess is

being run by another regiment thus my senior subalterns would create unnecessary complaints about the food and would write it in the register , this register is put up to the commanding officer who is the president of the mess committee after it has been seen by the mess secretary and finally it is seen and signed by the commander {brigade commander} there fore any complaint can have adverse impact on the chain of command with mess havildar suffering most. A good mess havildar will never produce the complaint book and can have many excuses including that it is already put up to the commander, he will bargain for the time and would send a flash signal to the mess secretary for his rescue and this cycle will keep on going, if the complaint is genuine it is okay but as I mentioned in certain cases it was political in nature where a regiment tends to balance its grievances against other in this way ,and all this is happening at subalterns level in the name of esprit de corps, for instance once we lost a hockey match to the regiment running the mess thus we resorted to these tactics. These did not last long as the moment second in commands of respective regiments were brought into picture the matter would be resolved but then again in certain cases careers of many good havildars were doomed in this manner.

With the passage of service i realized how vulnerable a mess havildar is. To keep a

dozen officers of varying seniority is a herculean task. To keep track of all expenditures and billing of every officer down to distribution of cost of plate of chips on three officers is not an easy task. It's a common practice in majority of the regiments to have a potential smart well deserving havildar who is due for his promotion as a mess havildar; majority of them are unable to even keep track of their own pay and allowances let alone to run a complete mess but that is the hurdle for his promotion if he is cleared by all the officers then he gets the promotion it is a catch 22 situation. At times these mess havildars are the best in the regiment especially the one which are running the station messes, they are reflection of the paltan.

There were many traits of mess havildar before modern enlightenment, a mess havildar was always seen supporting beard and a white cap and would give the look of the most pious person, he before assuming the appointment would be in light fly weight category but after few months would be in heavy weight. In bigger messes, mess havildar virtually runs the mess he used to control the working of all batmen, maali, the mess waiters are all under his command. He makes the daily purchase from the local shops and this can lead to his downfall if he is not clever.

Mess Secretary

Mess secretary is the one who runs the mess and is the one who can be held responsible for any thing that goes wrong in the mess, just for record I would highlight that between 1999-2007 all mess secretaries of aviation mess Rawalpindi were promoted to next rank, a mess secretary is a major who is usually not a staff college qualified but can be a logistic or intelligence course qualified but it is rare what is important is that he should be a board case. He has a separate office of his own with in the mess more importantly he has direct access to the commander, apart from the routine matters he also used to deal and control the guest rooms with in the mess, the guest rooms is another subject . It is regarded as the most thank less job in the army because no matter what a mess secretary does there will be always a group unhappy with him either on the menu or on the catering. The job has its perks for instance my course mate Major Farhat remained mess secretary for quite some time at Rahwali Aviation Mess and during that time he would go to the office at leisure time have cup of tea and just sit around. In majority of the cases mess secretary do not do any other work other than the mess, but what is the work of the mess frankly I have failed to understand all this in these years. His real energy and talent comes out during the VVIP visits and also during the ladies club functions which are held on regular basis in the mess normally in the shape of a milad. Also during the dine outs the mess

secretary has to be present. He conducts the monthly mess meetings which seldom are held on regular basis, his major achievement is always in the shape of a reduced catering amount for the members although the army rules are very clear on the catering that it cannot be more than one third the pay of the junior most dining member in the mess.

It is always good to be in the good books of the mess secretary he can let you use the ladies room, he can also allow you have a private party in the mess for your regimental officers and above all he can always hold back your name in the list of mess bill defaulters

Mess Waiters

One of the most loyal hard working and institution in them are the mess waiters. In old infantry and armour regiments there are second generations of mess waiters as well. It was in PMA that the first interaction is made with the waiters and platoon commanders in final term do tell about the mess waiters in the regiments, at that time at least it looked odd to me that these waiters can practically refuse to serve the officer with dinner if he is not properly dressed, now after quarter of a century in army I have nothing but respect for these mess waiters.

Let me start with Nizam who was the senior most mess waiter of my regiment, I think when I reported in

the regiment he was away and as such he was talked about, I came to know that he has been sent on secondment to Saudi Arabia and now the commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Sarwar has talked to some one and Nizam is coming back to the unit I also came to know that Nizam is an expert in making coffee, I have no hesitation to admit that I was bit surprised at the way this waiter was talked about any way Nizam arrived back in the unit and rather I stayed another three years in the regiment and Nizam was a source of strength in every aspect, humble and disciplined, he was the narrator of regimental history he knew about every piece of silver that regiment had and my regiment did not had much anyway, Nizam was responsible for the field mess which provides tea and other edibles during the office hours, he would serve the guests and also groomed the new waiters, during Ramadan when the tea bar is officially closed he would make the break fast for me and then place it in tea bar and then whisper in my ears that break fast is ready. Parties in regiment were also his domain since all senior officers knew him thus it was always wise to have him around during inspection of senior officers. It is in field area that true worth of any waiter is realised, my regiment being an anti aircraft remained deployed in the vicinity of Sargodha airfield and our field mess and regimental headquarters were located at one end of runway and field mess cooking was done in a tent. Come rain hail or thunder but never for once the

mess failed to serve hot food, on week end nights when majority of the married officers would go back to the cantonment and we bachelors had the whole area to ourselves thus till wee hours we would watch movies and Nizam was always there to serve coffee. As time passed on and officers kept on coming and going on postings it was only Nizam who was there to talk and share the happiness and sorrow. He would advise on the rate of smoking and tea consumption in a polite manner. I soon realised that now I am watchful lest any youngster pass any remarks about Nizam this is how I developed respect for the waiters.

It was in early days, that I went for an officers weapon course at Kharian and at that time Kharian had some very old traditional regiments stationed there, one day we few subalterns gathered courage and entered a Frontier Force Regiment mess probably Cooke's or Wilde's, mess was full of silver and other ornamentals, we were welcomed by the old waiter who served us tea but also kept a hawk eye on us, one of the officer over a cup of tea narrated that some times back one of the civilian friend of some officer took away a small silver tray from the mess and it was the chacha{old mess waiters are called chacha} who immediately realised that something is missing and duly informed the adjutant about this, the culprit was apprehended at the military check post. The old infantry and armour regiments have

silver and other collections that are worth over millions of sterling pound and it is only these mess waiters especially chachas who knew each piece by heart and slight variation in their placing and they will raise the alarm. At times the very officers of the regiment can borrow the pieces of regimental mess for their private purpose a mess waiter can do nothing if the commanding officer himself takes away a silver piece but the moment the gentleman is posted out and the chacha will highlight the issue to the next in line.

Amin ,Zahoor and Ghafoor were the three mess waiters at Karachi squadron where I first reported after getting my flying brevet, they were of my age and as such they will have some kind of trouble every day but since they were part of the squadron since its raising thus a very tolerable attitude was adopted by the officers. We would come at times very late from the city and one of them would always be there to serve hot or cold as the time demands , more importantly they would entertain our guests in our absence as well, it was youth time and almost all the bachelor officers had female friends and as per the policy of the army this was not a good sign yet it was these waiters who would cover us and act as the sentry and never for once they showed any sign that they have done any thing extra for us. Today all of us of that time have retired including our commanding officer Azam who retired as the General Officer Commanding

of army aviation, yet these three waiters are still there. Amin has six children by now and still loves to ride his bicycle all over the city, whenever any officer visits the squadron the first person he normally meets is any one of them and similarly these waiters always send their greetings.

Chacha Ismail was the senior most waiter in 9 Squadron when I reported there in 1992 he had a white long beard and a very impressive personality, he had a soothing impact on the squadron, as I type these words I can feel him standing next to me with a smile and telling me to have the breakfast before it gets cold and even if it gets cold I know he will pick the tea and will say 'let me get a fresh cup for you sir'. He died few years ago. His legacy is almost passed on to the next one who was trained by him and now when I go to squadron I find so much resemblance between Chacha Ismail and both having similar beard and persona.

Kazim of 4 Squadron is another such person he has grown up with me in the squadron, at time there were over a dozen officers in the squadron and without any flying activity thus the most important act of the day was the breakfast in the crew room after the morning class which would finish off at quarter past eight. Kazim had to cater for the taste of almost a dozen officers some asking for the parathas some French toast other having preference for the omelettes with green chillies and still

one odd asking for an omlete without any spices, credit goes to Kazim for complying all this bearing all kind of pressures with a smile, never in my stay of over three years I once saw Kazim loosing temper an incredible feat of temperament and patience.

Telephone.

Every mess had a military telephone and that was the cause of many many stories before the arrival of mobile telephones. Let me start from beginning, the telephone of mess had only military number and no access to dial even civil numbers in majority of messes but people from outside can dial the number. Just imagine you are young and lonely and all of a sudden while sitting alone in the mess you hear the phone ring and on other side is lovely female voice asking about some officer who long has been posted out and this is how conversation starts and also the beginning of a disastrous affair for many and successful end to few. In many messes only the senior subaltern used to sit next to the telephone and juniors were not allowed to pick the phone. I have seen in my own mess at Karachi where once commanding officer had to drive over ten miles from his house because he was getting the line busy for an hour. Beauty of military phones was that they could be disrupted by the operator in the mid of conversation. Thus operators were always in good book of many of young officers.

Television .

I have seen those days when there was only one channel operating on state run television and that too used to close down at 2200 hours. Thus there was no issue, we would enjoy watching the dramas and cricket matches. By evening after taking shower everyone would be in the mess, dinner followed by television. News was always watched intently. Then came dish television and it took all the charm of old days , now there were many channels and it was a pain to sit there as everyone would do the surfing, you cannot watch any thing. Since it was a anew thing to watch the semi nude dramas, songs and so on thus the old wall between the young and senior started coming under the pressure of modesty. There were issues like whether Indian channels should be allowed in the mess or not and this has never been resolved. In many messes one would find the instruction written in bold on top of set ‘ not to disturb the setting’ or ‘please call the mess havildar for any change in channel’. Reason being that the connections were given from the mess satellite to the senior officers’ homes as well.

Ladies Room.

Ladies are not allowed in the mess other than on mess nights but where to treat your ladies guests in the

mess. First the army does not acknowledge that you can have ladies friends not even your class fellows thus treating your female friends or relatives is an issue in army mess and as such the need for a ladies room.

Mess Meetings.

A monthly or bi monthly mes meeting is compulsory, in which all the dinning members are bound to attend, it is chaired by the commander {brigadier or even major general} all the points of mess are discussed in rather a infowmal manner but taht does not take the official gloss from it. Circular is passed among the regiments, venue is always the mess, mess secretary conducts it, he reads points from old meeting and the steps atken to improve the mess, resoloutions are forwarded and passed by majority. Financial bills are also passed. It is the most democratic affair within army way of life at no other forum so much freedom and active voice is given to officers other tahn on a mess meeting.

I had no idea about it when i first attended it, it was held at Sargodha, Brigadier Altaf was the commander. Points were not very serious , like allowing telephone calls to be made and book from mess number { we will see it was the answer} availability of newspapers in the ante room{ they were taken home by

the mess secretary} quality of food and so on. Aim was neither to harm the mess secretary and also to keep the relations cordial. Believe me for next ten years the points remained the same irrespective of the mess location. Few more points which were added in years were the use of ladies room and availability of warm water in the bachelors room. The points from commanders also remained the same in years ‘ respect the mess laws and traditions’.

Mess Renovations

Mess over the period have gone through a countless renovations hardly any mess is left intact in its original form, extensions , partitions and so on. In the inintial time period 1984-1994 there was not much but then it took a nose up attitude. I am not sure who started the race probably armour and signals branches as they had constructed new messes in 1984-85 at Rawalpindi and Nowshehra. Internal designers were hired and they have destroyed the mess decor by changing it into a hotel type decor from traditional military touch. Air Defence Mess at Rawalpindi, Armour Mess at Gujranwala , divisional mess at Lahore, Corps Mess at Rawalpindi are few of the examples of this renovations. Millions have gone into such venture and by mid nineties it became almost a fashion for every commander to change the

decor no matter even if it was done by the last one only couple of months ago. Mess became a punching bag, a testing ground for all budding commanders and their artistic better halves.

Ladies traditionally are kept away from mess life and from its affair but now they are playing an important role in its running . During Zia regime and even today the ladies functions are mainly restricted to Milad only with occasional fashion show exclusively for ladies but on the other hand these ladies have changed the decor of the mess by introducing new items like embroidery frames, glass work, poetry on walls, crystal, new colours in fabrics rather than sticking to leather.

Mess Nights.

Mess nights are the one in which the dinning members are supposed to take their meal in the mess wearing the mess kit, as per rules there are four nights in a week, in my quarter of a century in army i attended almost less number of mess nights also known as Dinner Nights, despite the fact that twice I took loan from bank to get the mess kit. Reasons are many fold. It does not hold true for all officers because the mess life varies with regiments. When i was posted as a second lieutenant at sargodha , it was having a category B Mess, the mess are categorised according to the number of the dinning

members thus school of instructions and divisional level messes are authorised certain allowance and manpower, at Sargodha it was a brigade mess built in 1974. A double storied building with guest rooms at upper level, a dinig room, ante room, TV room, Billiard room , library on the ground floor. We were supposed to have all the dresses including the mess kit which was white for summer and blue in winter. A second lieutenant cannot be promoted unless he was in possession of all the four dresses.

The concept of mess night revolves around in having a decent manner of dining, the regimental officers attend it, it just like taking normal dinner but with military grace and manners; this is how it was supposed to work but in reality it was not looked this in majority of messes. I think the very first dinner night i had was after almost three years of service, i was excited to wear the dress . Irony was that not even senior officers were in possession of the dress and thus most of the mess nights were conducted in simple uniform but that was lacking.

This cycle remained in vogue all through the service, some time a commander would certainly get charge and announce the regular mess nights{mostly in his first few days of command} there would be a rush to borrow the mess kits from colleagues and then everything fizzling out. In army aviation the same

pattern remained in use. In 1999 the new blue colour mess kit was introduced with a sash, it was to stand good for both summer and winter. I got it stitched from the Janjua tailors at Gujranwala for a cost of half month pay; i have no hesitation in admitting that I felt guilty in wearing because i was the only one in possession of new pattern. The real value of these diner nights became obvious when one of the officer at Gujranwala was found to be an accomplice in a robbery; his civilian friend was staying with him for over three months in the mess without any one taking notice and one day the officer found himself in warm waters; main reason was the absence of these dinner nights which allowed the officers to go unchecked.

Anyway coming back to mess nights, when ever it was held , it was a great feeling. Officers interacting in a cordial manner, mess havildar coming and smartly saluting and informing that dinner s ready. During the process one has to keep in line with the senior officer's speed of eating; everyone has to stop eating when the senior has finished dinner thus , senior eats slowly allowing everyone to enjoy the food.

Table and cutlery is laid in a pattern, you cannot have second serving during dinner night and neither to make a mountain of food in the plate.

Mess Manners.

Tea Break

Tea break as the name suggests is the break for having a cup of tea but in army it has much more to offer than a mere cup of tea. From military academy I learnt the importance of it as no matter what all is going on there will always be a break for tea, during firing, outdoor exercises, route marches, after or before launching an attack or a defence, it was there. In military academy the tea break comprised of cake piece and cup of milk{cold with rooh afza} and most look after event of the day, the waiters would just place the tub of milk in the one side of the lawn and during the tea break the cadets would just rush for it many a times the leading cadet finding himself inside the tub yet the others would have little thought of any impurity and would simply take their milk out of it.

An Evening in Aviation Mess 29 Peshawar Road. Rawalpindi. 9th March 2008

Sitting at a place it is evening, peaceful and your ears can pick up the chirping of the birds too, with complete shutting off of background noise of the traffic on the road. This is the very place that I have been sitting around for last 18-19 years. The time when I was young and in love. I was sitting just like as I am sitting now almost twenty years ago when she

arrived in the blue Suzuki car and then when she dropped me back, it was winter evening . The days of youth were spend here there were equal number of worries even than. Will we get married ? what will happen to my hair ? Are they going to stop falling or should I do something else ? how is world outside ? when will my financial conditions improve and above all would I be able to get the flying brevet, were the worries and thoughts of youth.

Years passed by infact only two when i was again sitting in the same mess lawn . I was married to the same girl. I had got the flying wing as well, I had seen the world outside as well. However my financial conditions were the same , I was unable to live within any means, my hair were falling. The major worry was am I going to live the life like this forever and I said no to myself, I will carve my own destiny. It was here sitting under the same shades and listening to the birds, I dreamed and fantasized about coming days

Couple of years passed and I was sitting here again thinking about life, I had two kids by now from the same girls for whom I used to wait in this lawn.

Uniform

Uniform has been a big issue in our army, the chiefs have never wanted to come out of it and subalterns were always insisting on not wearing it and preferring the track suit. Almost all issues of discipline starts with the uniform, a senior would always start putting a junior on mat with uniform as the base. In over 25 years the uniform has undergone so many changes that it is almost unbelievable to believe that we could not have a uniform at all unfortunately it is still going on and hopefully will remain a good past time for all future army chiefs.

In 1982 when i entered military academy the uniform was starched khaki as worn by our platoon commanders however there was one exception the commandant used to wear a green jacket in winters which was not worn by any other officer, it was a Korean duffel an unauthorised piece of uniform.

When i reported in the regiment the standard uniform was khaki consisting of a shirt and a trouser both starch, a pair of black leather rubber sole ankle high shoe called DMS ,a khaki web belt and a cap, looks simple but let me get into the nitty gritty of this simple uniform. First of all none knew where to buy the shoes, the other items were easily available in the market {i mean the cloth and the belt}there were no standard military stores rather any one can open them and store the items, who made these army items again none is sure

but mostly manufactured in Sialkot by private companies without adhering to any specific standards laid by the army and that includes shoulder ranks and titles apart from khaki and regimental berets. The very first day in the regiment i had black leather shoes Oxford, but i was given the DMS by the regiment I mean my so called batman brought it for me, now the rules were that officer cannot purchase any item of uniform from the regimental store as these were issued free of cost to the troops and were accounted for, therefore that shoes were drawn in the name of a soldier and given to me and i paid the amount to that soldier who in turn filed a loss statement which was vetted by the quartermaster and deposited to the state treasury. There used to a cross belt commonly called Sam Brown Belt basically a cavalry item but was part of the officers uniform since the First Great War and even before that, a week before my course reporting in the regiments it was withdrawn from the officers uniform and only junior commissioned officers were allowed to wear it when they were on duty, there was a confusion whether officers once on duty will wear it or not, thus i wore it twice and then it was made clear that officers will not wear it.

Headgear was another confusion, there was blue artillery beret, a khaki beret when one is in the field and then there was a Peak Cap which was worn when there was a visitor {a senior officer visiting regiment}. The

officer cane was part of the uniform and many a young officers were checked for not carrying it and especially not carrying it properly, the senior subalterns used to wave it as they wish but it was not allowed and neither it was allowed to touch any soldier or an officer with the stick it was an army offence. Let me just get on this cane business, this cane had different colours for varying arms and services but by and large other than armour regiments rest of the army had a standard cane but infantry regiments would have their own engravings on the cane and it was acceptable by the seniors, the commanding officers would have special kind of canes to display their own styles all against the dress regulations, the juniors would not be lagging behind and a special kind of cane came into fashion it was the Frontier Corps cane which had a knife in the centre and again many an officers were checked for carrying this but it was a hot item. Socks were again not clear, however the junior officers wore black but then again some were wearing khaki also and later even white cotton were quite popular, i got my first warning in aviation for wearing white socks back in 1988. The belt was another issue there was a standard cotton web belt of khaki colour with brass runners but a nylon web belt was also worn especially the senior majors and commanding officers. There was no standard raincoat or winter jacket, it was on the will of the officer to wear any thing. It looks unbelievable but this is how it was. The troops

were issued with the green winter jacket but as i said earlier that these were issued from the regimental stores against the number of the troops thus officers were not catered for, for them the Great Coat remained the army dress regulations dress but these were only issued at cold stations and any way these great coats were synonyms with the troops and i never saw any officer wearing it, only my platoon commander Major Tariq used to wear it during the military academy exercises and cadets used to make fun of him{certainly in private}.Another essential part of the uniform was a hand held diary, every officer would carry it, these were crested with regimental crests and have few plastic sheets to hold typed data and a writing pad ,adjutant, quartermaster, second in command and commanding officers all have their own writing pads and it was an offence to use any body else's pad.

Now lets start from morning parade, the physical training, the army dress regulations requires a white trouser and shirt for the officer and junior commissioned officers and khaki trouser or shorts for the other ranks, white jersey for the junior commissioned officer{it was issued to them }and regular green jersey for the troops ,officers were also required to wear the white jersey purchased at their own expense from open market, white shoes for the officers and JCO's and a khaki canvas shoes of ankle length were issued to the troops. In reality in 1984 the officers were still wearing the standard white

dress but mostly it were shorts and seldom a junior officer wore trouser.

The first change came in 1985 when wash n wear khaki of Rauf Textile Mills of Karachi was introduced ,it was initially meant for the senior officers but soon everyone was wearing it, it remained in use till 2003,but it had a chequered history, first of all tales of corruption were associated with its induction which i believe are rumours but again they were there. I had the first pair in 1985 while i was in Rawalpindi attached with the Anti Air Craft Command for the Giraffe Radar, it was loose fitting and had nothing glamorous but it was in thing ,soon it was starched and thus it maintained some kind of crease but by early 90's another phenomena took place , other mills also started producing the similar kind of cloth and at less cost thus it was next to impossible to have a uniformity of colour in any regiment. Many rather almost all commanding officers would ordered their officers to buy the cloth from central canteen stores department yet there were many CO's themselves who bought the inferior cloth before becoming colonels and as such once they were wearing the wrong pattern then how can you expect the juniors to wear the proper one, so much so that that uniform was dyed again and again, this phenomena mostly took place in services .

The American web belt and green jacket was a stylish thing, officers returning from the secondment

from Saudi Arabia had these two items along with the American DMS shoes which were slightly different from own pattern[they also had Ray Ban glasses as well}. I can recall many incidents in which i was checked for wearing this belt, infact i did not owned any belt but my unit officer and room mate Captain Mehmood had one so sometimes he would be kind enough to let me wear this . It was General Aslam Baig who finally allowed the wearing of green belt in the army in 1990,thus it became a symbol of an officer that he is wearing the American Belt ,troops were not allowed to wear this, Baig did not specify the shoes but they also crept in.

General Asif Nawaz was the first army chief who tried to arrest this trend, he in fact took certain steps to bring the army back to the discipline, he reintroduced peak cap as part of the uniform thus beret was reserved for the troops and peak cap became an officers head gear.

The famous exercise Zarb i Momin first saw the introduction of American camouflage uniform ,in the beginning only the general officers wore it but the camouflage jacket became a hit, the other green jacket by this time became an acceptable norm however there were many instances where officers were checked for wearing it, the dilemma remained the same that no winter jacket was officially authorised for the officers ,they in fact wore anything which was green, the officers

who had motorcycles were the most affected ,there were no standard pattern of gloves either, the khaki woollen gloves and scarves were again meant for the troops however army dress regulation do mention the khaki woollen scarf as part of officer uniform but again it was never clear to any one, however a green parachute cloth scarf became an in thing to be worn by the officers in winter and to some extent in summer also.

Dress No 5 is an enigma, it is that famous bush shirt dress which is worn by the generals especially the army chiefs and presidents Zia and Musharraf. When i was a young officer it was mutually decided and agreed among the subalterns that only president or general can wear it, so much so it was a myth among young officers that a general can wear any kind of uniform that is how we used to see it. In 1994 while at Multan I studied army dress regulations the way a religious scripture is studied and I finally reached the conclusion that I as a major can wear it, there is nothing which stops me or any other officer from wearing it, the only restriction which it lays down is that it has to be worn while performing duty inside or in other words it can not be worn while in field, for example you cannot wear it while carrying out firing at ranges and further more Oxford shoes are to be worn with it. I got it stitched from the Khayyam tailors in Multan Saddar, i was in a different state of mind in that phase of military life, i was enjoying it, but i have no

hesitation in admitting it that it took some nerves to wear it and stand in front of the squadron. I am at loss of words to explain how and why this phenomena crept into our army where even wearing a good uniform became a point of stress for me and my seniors so much so that it was highlighted in my annual confidential report. Colonel Liaqat Raja was the Combat Group Commander and he also used to wear this pattern of uniform and in addition he was putting on reflecting sun glasses which were made famous by Colonel Qaddaffi in those days thus I was let off the hook, years later I kept on wearing it and i must acknowledge Brigadier Arif Rasool my commandant in Aviation School and Major General Azam the general officer commanding for accepting this .

The service dress are a story by themselves ,in 1984 a second lieutenant was required to produce four service dresses{SD} as a pre requisite for promotion. they were winter and summer service dresses and mess kits. The SDs were ceremonial dresses and to be worn in day but different SDs for dinner in mess thus they were known as mess kits. The winter SD was dark brown beretha cloth and winter mess kit was blue in colour , the summer SD was light khaki in colour and mess kit was white in colour ,i am specifying only the artillery and services only, the infantry had different shades according to Punjab or Frontier Force etc etc ,armour was most

dashing with each regiment having its own design and pattern. Cloth was to be purchased from the open market and i had all the four dresses ready but never in my life i got a chance to wear them and ultimately the design and pattern were changed in mid nineties. There was no concept of wearing them at least in Sargodha brigade or in Ack Ack and neither in infantry school. The new design came which removed the tie and made it close collar yet retaining the green shirt to be worn underneath, also by this time since the cross belt has been removed from the SD thus there was a need to have a new design but it took years before it was implemented. Finally a new cloth was designed and manufactured by the Lawrencepur which as they state is cold in summers and warm in winters{strange}it is close collar and again a lot of correspondence took place on the shoes, initially it was supposed to be worn with Wellingtons with spurs but finally it settled down to a knee height black leather shoe with side zip and no spurs. The kamarband was a late addition and again it took many letters to finally reach a conclusion regarding on which side the frills will hang.

Coming back to camouflage uniform i had the first addition stitched in January 2002 when i was deployed at Gujranwala with 27 Squadron, the initial cloth was cotton and I got it tailored from Janjua Tailors of Gujranwala but before the end of the month the first

amendment came and cloth approved was fifty percent cotton and rest polyester, then a debate started in which higher headquarters pondered over the colour ,when it was settled in the form of two colours one for the northern theatre and other for the southern theatre. In 2007 another design was introduced in which the pockets were removed from the front and rear and then in 2009 the flaps were also removed and in 2010 the web belt has been finally eliminated and there has been drastic changes in the size of the medals and ribbons and new insignias have been introduced. A new addition of army dress regulations have been issued also, it seems that khaki has seen the end but my gut feelings tells me that the new army chief will carry on this tradition and belt is bound to make a comeback.

Aviation dress is bit different from the regular army, first a complete kit is issued free of cost by state to every pilot that includes watch ,sun glasses and shoes apart from cover all and a jacket. The most important is the sunglasses and jacket as no one in the army is allowed to wear sunglasses other than the aviators and winter jacket has finally resolved the issue of what to wear over the uniform in winters. The shoes are also different from the standard army pattern, they are called flying shoes but from here the story starts.

I joined aviation in 1989 and we students were encouraged to wear flying shoes which are light in weight and more comfortable the main aim is to feel the pressure on the controls, they are made only in Rawalpindi initially the Valika Shoes made them and later the cobbler at Qasim also started making them, the pattern is to have a zipper in the middle of the shoe as copied from the air force but army aviators started having their own designs ,some would have the zip on the side and so on {mostly very senior aviators}and it is not possible that aviator will only wear the coverall and not the standard uniform in the same day thus when they will be wearing khaki then the shoes were the one with side zip which absolutely becomes a private shoe under a uniform. In mid eighties aviators went to USA for conversion on Cobras and they were given American DMS which were more rugged and bit heavy, they were black in colour and made of good quality leather, aviators made changes in it also, some would wear it without adding a zip and others added zipper either to the front or to the side thus on any given day it was a miracle to have a standard pattern of uniform in the aviation. In some aviation squadrons the pattern was to come to the office in uniform and then change into the flying dress for flying and then again change into uniform and heads back home, it was resorted as a kind of disciplinary measure when the commander wants to be bit tough but it created its own dilemma as to carry a

complete set of uniform including shoes and jersey is quite a work because many commanders would object even to wearing of the flying jacket over the uniform, however aviation remained flexible in its outlook but it did not solve some fundamental issue ,the flying shoe was not suitable for the field work as it did not had a good grip, moreover the pattern of issuing a new shoe was quite relaxed ,an officer on given date was given a chit to go and get his new shoe made from the specified cobbler and officers got private shoes made for the same cost . In 2007 the orders were given that flying shoes will not be worn under the uniform thus an officer now has to carry two pair of shoes everyday while going to office.

Words about lady doctors uniform, they again has no special dress items, my wife had saree of different colours because no specific cloth was ever made available in the army stores, no shoe of any specification and above all no winter jacket. In Skardu she would wear green jacket purchased from market, simple socks and simple coat shoes in snow.

Tailors

The most famous tailor was and he is still alive, the president body guard tailor in Rawalpindi, as a youngster I had listen about him and it was in 2002 that I first met him at the PBG regiment, i was wearing the

dress No 5 which incidentally is the working dress of the PBG and within minutes he pointed certain mistakes in the dress which he was not entirely correct to do so but he made his point by dropping the names of senior officers that I was grateful to him for at least taking my measurements and promising to make the uniform in near future, he pointed out to the register and to the side of his shop, 'here is chief of staff's uniform, corps commanders uniform ,I had a discussion with adjutant general on the size of ribbons they have agreed and so on'... it is a pleasure and a short virtual tour of history in his shop.

Janjua Tailors of Gujranwala, Kharian and Lahore are i believe the last of the mohicans left who are engaged in tailoring, at one time Ismail Sons used to be located on the Mall Rawalpindi and i had the fortune of watching their last rites in 2002 when they sold their shop and wares including their almost century old showcases and medals ,I think Zong mobile company has the shop now. I personally preferred Janjua tailors both at Gujranwala and at Lahore. The shop at Gujranwala made our uniform when we were in the aviation school and later i got my service dresses made from them also yet it is only the PBG tailor who is actually good in making a proper bushshirt/coat.

The regimental tailors are all good provided if one really encourages them but the dilemma is that no

matter how good they make a dress and that includes only uniform the officer and troops are never satisfied with him, in the past when uniform was made of khaki drill cotton then all minor shortcomings were covered in the starch and furthermore a uniform was supposed to be stitched like a uniform ,with the advent of wash n wear the uniform trouser became a civilian trouser with officer and troops insisting on having length and width of their own choice and favour, i have seen many soldiers especially from medical and signal corps whose uniform trousers were a sore sign. These tailors had small shop in the regiment and are normally with the regiment for over decades. Mostly they are busy in stitching the ladies cloth of regimental officer's wives

Raising Day

Raising day is an important feature and function of the army life It general takes place once in a the year or to be more specific once in a commanding officers' tenure, generally in the year in which he is going. Raising day is basically the birthday of the unit and is celebrated in many ways depending upon the location, station, the financial condition of the regimental accounts and most importantly on the career pattern of the commanding officer.

The very first raising day that I attended was in 1984 and it was combined with the farewell of the commanding officer {Lieutenant Colonel

Umar} I was so full of regimental spirit that I came all the way from Kharian to Sargodha where I was attending the weapon course, today the distance may look small but at that time I had to sit on top a bus roof to reach the regiment. The first real raising day was in aviation in Karachi, our commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Azam was a Baluchi officer and as such he had the infantry spirit in him , he made elaborate arrangements for the occasion and all officers were given some kind of task ,the one task which every one had was to arrange the funds, the most convenient being to ask for an advertisement from hotels and firms. This provided us youngsters with an easy excuse of loitering in the city. Souvenirs had to be made and no raising day is complete without having memento of it, normally key chains, diaries wallets, are the standard items, days of mind pondering and designing is involved in such simple matters, endless rounds of conferences and meetings took place between the officers, food had to be catered for, accommodation for the guests coming from out stations have to reserved, since the main emphasis was on the reunion and inculcating the spirit among the officers there fore cribbing was not allowed. I remember that I telephoned Moin Akhtar the celebrated comedian and tried to lure him to perform without any charges but he refused. The squadron was painted new and furniture was polished, if I am not wrong the corps commander was Lieutenant General Asif Nawaz Janjua and he gave

the squadron some amount in advance for the function the catering was to be done by the La Rosh caterers . A well thought programme was chalked out by the commanding officer ,I still remember his words that you youngsters will learn a lot from this and it will help you in later years, I agree with him as this experience really broaden the mind. On the given day despite all these precautions and care the inevitable happened, the first being that the raising day memorial publication magazine which was being published by the father in law of Captain Mukhtar at very reduced rates was published with wrong pictures and there was nothing which could be done at that time but the best part happened at the dinner time ,the general officer commanding army aviation Major General Zafar Askree was kind enough to be the chief guest as corps commander had certain commitments,. The general was coming from Rawalpindi on a commercial flight and Captain Suhail was detailed as the conducting officer to receive him at the airport and then to bring him straight to the dinner which was at the squadron mess located next to the Drigh Road. We all kept waiting and waiting and finally the car arrived but there was none inside except the driver and before we could understand or comprehend what has happened the General and Captain Suhail emerged from the bushes with general fuming with anger and Captain Suhail with his trade mark smile trying to defuse the situation, the story went that since

they were getting late for the dinner and there was a traffic jam on the road so Captain Suhail suggested the general who was in sherwani to walk across the road in order to save time as they crossed the road Captain Suhail in order to further save the time took the general through the bushes and lost the way. The last episode occurred when Captain Suhail also lost the complete film rolls of the raising day.

The next raising day I took part was in 2005 at Skardu almost after a lapse of 15 years but in all these intervening years I kept on attending raising days of various regiments mostly because as an aviator I got more invitation cards and also at times one was part of the crew .

At Skardu I was second in command and as such had the access to the politics that went behind the doors, the first and foremost is the choice of chief guest and in northern areas none other than GOC can be a chief guest than comes the other matters like souvenirs, food and guest list ,my commanding officer was Ubaid a master of military politics, luckily I after carrying out the initial paper work went on a one month leave with only one task to bring back enough beer from Rawalpindi for the Raising Day which I did. I cannot forget the scene which I saw from the narrow mountainous road at night while i was driving towards the Skardu Base, the whole squadron

was luminated with festive lights, I had never seen that kind of lights in the Skardu and I am sure none other in Skardu till that time had seen this much. We had real fun but there was tension as well because now the guests had also arrived and as such everyone was giving his advices and that resulted in last minute shifting of everything but officers and jawans worked in an atmosphere of festivity and joy. Excellent food and reception for the chief guest and his family, almost everyone from Skardu was invited which matters to the squadron, the local audit teams, the military engineering services ,station headquarters and so on. The fire wood was transported from the high remote areas by the pilots which gave an aroma that was pleasant and remained in air for days. The souvenirs were carefully selected and packed for the selected people and dignitaries.

Any raising day has two parts one that deals with the officers and other that deals with the troops there is always a dinner in the mess and there is always a dinner with troops, the ceremony normally starts with a darbar and later in the day there is normally a volley ball or tug of war match between the retired and serving officers and troops; the main feature of any raising day is the musical night and the short play that is composed by the troops with the assistance of the officer, one cardinal point that is always observed is not to make fun of the commanding officer or his office that

is sacred in nature, any way in the panthomine the commanding officer was poked . Next day again traditionally the whole squadron was given a day off, it was a function well arranged and conducted but now comes the hard part the ‘financial accounts of the event’, the returning of the borrowed items and traditionally military units are not good in this aspect. Commanding officer now sobered; wanted to get even with the officer who cracked a joke at him in the drama , it was quite an experience to be part of such politics.

Another high profile raising day was held at 9 Squadron in 2007 under Lieutenant Colonel Sardar Sajjad , Sajjad conducted this event with a theme and that was the beauty of the event, the theme were the martyrs of the squadron, he was able to get together all the veterans of the squadrons and also to have a colonel of the squadron ceremony as well.

The young officers usually resent these ceremonies for the reason that they{ceremonies} become hypocritical in nature and a stepping stone for the seniors’ careers’. The involvement of ladies is another sore issue as officers wives have to be the conducting ladies with the families of the senior officers, the ration of the troops is used without their eating much of it. On the other hand the plus points of a raising day are also immense especially in remote areas they break the monotonous life pattern of the regiment

and in cantonments they are a source of entertainment.

Presentation

Presentation in its literal meaning is putting up something in an orderly manner and in army it has been taken to new heights. I gave the very first presentation in my officer weapon course at Kharian in 1984 and i found it nothing different from a public speaking yet a presentation has many segments the most important being the introduction and then main body finally recommendations and conclusion, however as a thumb rule the officers concentrate only on the introduction and conclusion as it has been passed down through the seniors that a senior officer only reads these two segments, this is what i learnt in my initial years and it works not all the time but most of the time. The very first presentation that i saw was in my own regiment on the very first day of my reporting there in September 1984, all the officers were busy in a hall, by busy i mean they were talking to each other or passing orders to have chairs here or there because in reality the only person who actually was working was the havildar making and amending slides which were plastic in nature and had to be displayed on a wall with the help of a view graph, I also learnt that a good tea break is the core of a good presentation and that requires a lot of coordination like at what time the hot items have to be brought in from the mess and in what order but the menu of a tea break is a

high task and in my youth days it was the domain of very senior officers and we the juniors were only to learn from their wisdom. The one bite patties and pastries were introduced in army in late eighties and were a great hit.

A presentation starts with a theme and that is normally given by the higher head quarters, presentations can be classified in many categories ,one category is which is given by a student in a school of instruction and this also vary with the level of institution and the course. In early days the slides were the paramount means although charts were also used but by 1984 they were bit old and displays the lack of interest of the student thus slides have to be made and who makes these slides none but the TA havildar or an officer with a very good handwriting, the slides were of a regular page size on which key points were written in a drawing ink by using the writing set which were there in every regiment as part of private property the soluble markers were something new at that time and were not available in small stations.

Let me just go back to the time of that course and i recall that one of my course mate Lieutenant Sultan Maqsood had a good presentation in terms of the slides and that set the pace of the course, the reason being that his elder brother was already in the army and he knew how to make the presentations which as i stated earlier

revolves around the TA havildar, for the others we had to find such a person and it was not easy , moving on in the regiment when i was the adjutant i had to make one such presentation, my commanding officer guided me about the photo slides, which were rare in those days yet very powerful in terms of conveying the contents, it revolves around taking pictures of actual things or from the magazines on photo slides mode of the normal roll yet the roll at that time was developed only either at Agfa Laboratory at Karachi or at Rawalpindi ,in fact I believe it was only done at Karachi and then the pictures can be displayed on a special viewgraph which were available in brigades even officers used to have them as personal property. Thus i went to Pakistan Air Force Base Sargodha for this purpose and it was here that I met Flight Lieutenant Tahir Farooq which later turned into a life long friendship, I also went to Karachi at my own expense for the developing of these slides and another episode took place there which I think i can narrate. After the development of the slides at Defence Authority site of the laboratory i was riding a motor bicycle which i had borrowed from an officer doing the course at Ack Ack School, around midnight i decided to visit my old class fellow Farruk Shahzad who was living at Azizabad; when close to the roundabout i was checked by the local police and on disclosing my identity they took me to the police station and very narrowly i managed to come out without suffering any injuries, it was unusual and next

day i informed my relative Lieutenant Colonel Bashir Ahmed also in the school about the incident and he got excited and informed the higher headquarters about this and also updated about the back ground, a day earlier the students of the school had beaten up an police person for some reason and this was the reaction of that. It was not unusual in those days {1985 onwards} of physical clashes between the army aviation officers and police personals and it will not be out of place to cite that the fall out of Junejo's government had one such clash as one of the reason, it took place in Rawalpindi .

Reverting back to the presentations there was another presentation at Sargodha which the brigade commander gave to the Vice chief of army staff General Khalid Mahmood Arif, it was the biggest in terms of the rank and as such for many weeks prior to it was the talk of the mess. In the field the presentation which were termed as briefing were given on the charts, there seems to be a hairline difference between the presentation and the briefing and later on with the years passing by it was not possible to draw a difference but at that time charts and the slides were the difference.

Nights would be spent in the regiment on preparations for the presentation, Naib Subedar Abid was our TA and as such responsible for making the slides and the charts, he was of a frail body and his room would be full of smoke of cigarettes and litres of tea

would be consumed in making a single presentation, the irony was that if a single mistake has been made by him in writing on the slide then the remedy was to rectify it by using a blade over the word and then powdering it to cover the scratch. There were another type of slides as well which were called photo slides they came in late eighties, in this a page of presentation typed on an electronic type writer would be copied through a photo copier and the problem of mistake was removed, however electronic type writers were available only at brigade level and also these slides were not available in small cantonments. It is not an exaggeration that officers posted in Kashmir would come all the way down to Rawalpindi to make slides for the presentations. I had a use of these slides and electronic type writer at Gujranwala when my course mate Captain Khalid Shahbaz was the grade three officer in the armoured brigade there.

In the presentation party apart from the officers actually delivering the script the role of view graph operator also an officer was very important as it was his duty to synchronise the whole operation of the slides movement in relation with the script, the slides at times numbering over fifty would be placed next to him and he had to keep his pace with the speaker, today it looks very trivial in nature but it was gigantic task for the reason that every regiment wanted to excel in this art and some

of the key features were that speaker should not have an eye contact with the operator and it should work in a clock wise manner that was the beauty or the wastage of time and energy. Words about viewgraphs also, we had our first interaction with them at the military academy where one viewgraph was always placed in each class room, it had a bulb which definitely had a life but as cadets we had no knowledge of how the things are procured and kept in army , it was in regiments that i came to know that it had a life and is expensive to replace as such they were never used for the purpose for which they were issued by the training directorate and always kept for the presentations of the commanding officer; yet the fear of its bulb failing at that moment as part of Murphy Law required another viewgraph as stand by, a rehearsal of replacing the viewgraph on actual day was also carried out. A presentation also apart from slides was also bound to have a hard copy of the script to be placed in front of the visiting commander and what a pain it used to be , the script would very seldom be finalised at least forty eight before the appointed hour and as such the last twenty four hours in any regiment would be more or less like the ‘chand raat’ when final touches would be given to the script and the place itself. It had to be binded but then the question of whether to ‘ring bind’ it or ‘clip bind’ would take many a sessions, at times the ring binding would have been in a wrong way and found only at the last moment.

Another very important aspect that was part of the presentation culture was the offering of cold drinks to the visiting officer, it looks odd but it was important to pin point at what time and which cold drink is to be offered ,generally in the initial years a well dressed waiter would walk in carrying a tray in which water, coca cola and an orange juice would be placed and he would place it in front of the visiting officer and then hold on; it is not finished yet, at another appropriate time say after ten minutes he would walk in again carrying tea, green tea and coffee and coffee would of two types beaten and black. In reality the regiment would check in with the staff officers of the visiting officer about his preferences , there were numerous letters later issued from the higher headquarters to simplify the issues which in reality were not an issue but a special breed of officers were busy all the time in evolving new means to become the blue eyed boys of the commanders and presentations were one such means.

These presentations were quite useful in the intellectual grooming of the officer but sadly very rarely a genuine effort and research was made to get the data for dissemination, for most part the traditional ‘Chappha’ the old print was used, a military presentation was tailored to the liking of the commander and seldom based upon the out come of the study it self. English remained the standard and official language of the army

however it is also a fact that all officers do not come from the same educational or social back ground moreover the accent of an individual is an individual thing and it cannot be changed and neither it should be, the officers belonging to Lahore or Kashmir have distinct pronunciation features this issue becomes paramount in presentation at higher level, I have seen many and been part of many presentation where the English of the junior officers was much better than the senior and yet they had to adjust to the level of the senior, many officers were labelled with this stigma that their English is better than their commanding officer, in my case it was my commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Sarwar who improved my English by highlighting the use of tenses which i am sure still requires a lot of improvement.

One good presentation which i recall is the one which I prepared in 3 Army Aviation Squadron in 1993 it was about the Indian army aviation and there was no chappha of that, i got the help of the intelligence directorate and above all went through the Indian army's news letter SainaK Samachar which were available in the station library and through that i build up the case and data ,the findings were very interesting ,own intelligence directorate had given a certain number of pilots available in every squadron basing simply upon that apart from the crew of two pilots in each gun ship

helicopter the Indians are maintaining a stand by pilot also and this calculation was spread over the entire Indian army aviation there by a number in excess of over 600 were marked as the pilots, in reality it was not more than 200 hundreds including pilots posted on staff appointments. This is one example of a presentation giving the desired results and there were many more yet all were distracted by the culture of presentations.

Computers did not make the matter better rather it made it more cumbersome as now the changes could be incorporated at the last minute as well and these changes were nothing more than the colour and how the slides will appear and fade, the movies could be added as well, the spell check became easy but it had its own drawbacks as in certain cases computer would pass the words of dubious nature as well, printing became easy but again in the initial days of mid nineties the laser printers were only available in higher headquarters and ink dot at regiment level.

MAALI' THE GARDENER

I have always been impressed by this dedicated trade. No matter it is raining, cold or hot summer but the first person to come across in the morning probably after a sweeper in a unit or if you draw the curtain of your room or a guest room; he is the

maali. After the murder of Benazir Bhutto on 27th December 2007 at Rawalpindi and fortunately or unfortunately I was also there in aviation mess. It was a night full of fears not for personal safety but for the future of country itself. It was cold, damp, foggy, dark, a depressed night and next morning complete shutdown continued all over the country, petrol pumps, trains, buses, banks were closed, burnt, even army offices were deserted but the first person I saw working when I draw the curtain of my guest room No 14 looking straight in the mess lawn were the gardeners preparing flower beds.

It was in the mid of my career that another officer pointed to me 'have you ever notice that these maalis always work in the front lawn of commanding officer office where they are visible to him and from then onwards I started observing this phenomena and found it amazingly true. Before the arrival of commanding officer they would work at particular vantage points. Slowly and gradually they would (normally there are two gardeners in a unit) work at those place which fell enroute to commanding officer's way and then as he arrives in the office one of the maali would invariably work in his line of sight and the other would be off to officers bungalow. In my initial years of career I was not fully aware of their importance other than asking for a bouquet of flowers on

certain occasions. I have never done Q side of the army job and these maali fall In the jurisdiction of quarter master.

In 1992-93 after getting married and being allotted a house I fully become aware of his expertise. There are over a dozen officer in a unit and almost half a dozen are married with married accommodation. Now there is one fully trained maali and second is his understudy. It is desire of every officer especially the newlywed to have rose birds outside house lawn and to plant new trees and above all a kitchen garden. Majority of the officer and myself no exception are by and large ignorant about gardening but just wanted to have a beautiful lawn overnight. But wishes and desires alone are not sufficient even of you are willing to spent money.

First maali is not available at the most he is allotted to work in every officer's house once a week for an odd hour. If you question him in official manner as majority do so in their first interaction, the answer is very simple 'I am busy at commanding officer's residence and you cannot argue about that. Slowly you would start getting involved in this affair. If you are quarter master of the regiment than you are lucky. If you are senior to QM than initially you will try to be official but it is will prove futile than you will get friendly with QM , it might bear some fruit, as a

last resort you will discuss the matter with second in command even then it is no use and finally you will realize that key is with Maali himself.

Maali by nature are good, simple and poor so you talk with him and will realize his problems. He seldom has spare time left. He works from early morning till late evening and his pay is very low. He also has to eat in the cook house on payment which is in the hand of commanding officer or quarter master to forego and that is why he knows his priorities. But still he is happy. Majority rather always they are from the native areas, mostly Punjabis and Pathans. They without exception always grow poppy flowers in mountain regiment stations. I can recall the school of mountain and snow warfare at Abbottabad, my own regiment at Sargodha had the poppy flowers.

Once they have established their rapport with you they will give viable suggestions for improvement of lawn which generally include buying of water pipe. As a youngster I never had the time to meet him because when we were in office he was busy at house and when we were at home, he was gone. Later in service I was able to catch him while he was busy in his lunch in the regiment.

He will inspect the lawn and first observation which he gives involves changing of

complete base and layer of earth, by having one or two cart of river bed mud spread over the existing. If you can manage it yourself it would be an achievement in itself. Because it involves getting the military vehicle on payment arranging the working party from adjutant and so on. In younger days one is not fully aware of the inherent risk 'Murphy Law' that involves in getting vehicle, its movement to the river bed, you can opt for this option but by and large no field officer generally go for this option. I have seen many officers mostly all below the rank of lieutenant colonels who have got a bad chit mainly for this issue. Once a vehicle goes out of cantonment anything can happen, it can have accident, it can topple, it can hit a passerby, it can be checked by military police for not having a valid duty slip and thus a military report starts moving. All these have actually happened. I admit that after the Peshawar house where i was able to plant trees and have a garden kitchen too i was never successful in having all the preliminaries of a garden complete which includes level grass, flower beds and vegetable garden and not to forget the flower bed outside the house. I have seen some real beautiful gardens and lawns in many cantonments especially the Gujranwala. Credit goes to the maali and also to the occupant of the house.

Spring time is the happy times for maalis, their efforts bring colour to the office

environment. It is customary to have the flowers placed in a plate in every office especially the Mootia. The rose bouquet is reserve for commanding officer's office. I at times would fetch one rose for my wife and later for my daughter from the regiment garden. One has to be careful even in this because you never know the mood of senior officer on plucking of flower.

There cannot be a better stress releaser than the enjoyment which one gets from watering your law. As a grown up person you can travel back down the time when once you were a kid and used to play with water at that time one is generally scolded by parents for throwing water here and there but now there is no check; other than that of wife.

Siachen Glacier

In over 4000 years of military history man has fought valiantly at strange places and for strange causes but never before till 1983 he has fought at such dizzy heights and low temperatures as Pakistan and India clashed over Siachen glacier, the world's largest glacier measuring **70 KM** in length with width of 4-8 Kilometres. World second highest peak mount Godwin Austin K-2 is located in the same region along with other 4 peaks over 8000 meters ,there are more than 100 peaks over 7000 meters scattered in the area. **Great Indian sub-**

continent which is the seat of Indus civilization, the very civilization is over 5000 years old, the life line of this civilization is river Indus which has its watershed in the same region {Lake Mansowar} the other great river of subcontinent river Ganges also has its source in Simla located in great Himalayan range. There are three great mountain ranges in the world namely Himalaya, Hindu Kush and Karakorum, these ranges have bounded Indian subcontinent from north and west, near Gilgit these three ranges meet at one point. Himalaya runs north westerly direction like a spinal cord running along the body, Kashmir, Nepal and Burma are located on this range, it forms the natural barrier towards north against China, Mount Everest and Nanga Parbat “the killer mountain” are part of this range. Hindukush runs in Easterly direction and forms the Eastern flank of subcontinent before it merges into the Arabian sea it divides Afghanistan and Persia from subcontinent, most of the foreign invaders have adopted this route in the past to invade subcontinent Alexander, Mongols, Taimour and Mughals all came from the passes through this range.

KARAKORUM is the majestic of all the other two ranges it is smallest in area occupying only two square degrees on the million map but concentration of high, barren, wild, glaciated void of any living being exception being wild roses that too not beyond 15000 feet peaks are more than at any other part of the world, it is the

apex of world ,Marco polo was wrong when he tagged Central Asia as the roof of the world but that was maximum which man has ventured till 13 century. These mountains were there since the time immortal although geologist do debate that nature has gone through fundamental changes over period of time ,the very glaciers and mountains which we see today as barren hell may have been a green pasture few centuries back. The local folk legend also talk of a village at the foothills of K-2 and of royal hunting ground at Chogolisa .
Khunjerab pass in the Karakorum is the only passable way through which highlanders from Central Asia could descend down to the plains of Indus river after negotiating thousand kilometres long Indus valley, other alternate passes or la as the local calls them are so remote, high, narrow and cold that it requires something of Hanniball crossing Alps with the elephants. Before the advent of John's Company no one in India was aware of these fabulous mountains in the North. By 1810 when India was under British Raj, River Sutlej was the boundary between Sikh empire and the Viceroy. Ranjit Singh the one eyed lion of Punjab had firm control over the Kashmir which was the gateway to the Karakorum ranges. Britishers were anxious to explore the hidden heaven and thanks to diplomacy of horses, wine and women the three only weaknesses of Maharaja Ranjit Singh ,many of legendary adventurers like Savoy, Vigne, Moorcraft, Burnes, Young husband, Joseph wolff, Baron

carl von Hugel, and many others were able to explore the area and this is how modern world came to know about these ranges and the passes which interconnect varying valleys and finally leading to the Pamirs ,Takhlanan desert and Central Asia . In 1851 survey of India carried out trigonometric triangulation of subcontinent during which Mount Everest was declared as the highest mountain in the world similarly K-2 was also spotted in this time. apart from exploration British had one major concern regarding Russians invading subcontinent through the passes leading from Pamir towards Karakorum a chess board like tussle started between the two powers which Kipling termed as the Great Game. By the end of 19 century

British had Gilgit and surrounding areas like Hunza and Chitral under their control with a resident looking after the affairs. Algernon Durand was one such resident whose elder brother Mortimer Durand in 1896 drew the famous Durand line the boundary between India and Afghanistan. In 1912 another explorer by the name of Fanny Bullock and her husband William while exploring Karakorum carried out first survey of Siachen glacier. Glaciers are thick flat grounds of ice which provides excellent skiing arena however they are full of dangers and hazard like sea ,beneath flat ground are crevices ,moraines, falls, pinnacles ,false ice bridges ,there are two ways to traverse it either move on it or

walk at the edges where there is a sudden and surprise barrage of stones from the adjoining rocks in summer and avalanches in the winter . Couple wrote elaborate details about Siachin the biggest glacier outside polar world, which provides a link to move from Central Asia towards Skardu and Nubra valley and then down the vale of Kashmir to the plains of Punjab and Sind. Williams were not the first one to discover possible route from China to India ,in 1892 Conway Saddle had already crossed the Karakorum from Karakorum pass and then via Conway saddle traversed Baltoro glacier before reaching Skardu .

In 1948 a cease fire was agreed upon which drew a Line of Control {LOC} from Chenab river towards North in a curving fashion amounting to 430 kilometers up till point NJ 9842 which is short of Chinese border .At that time no man has ventured there thus both countries agreed on a common statement defining border in this remote area “Thence North to the Glaciers”. In 1954 K-2 was first surmounted by the Italians they went through Pakistan so did many other expeditions for other peaks in Karakorum range. In subsequent two wars fought in the region bitter fighting took place along LOC but no ventures were undertaken beyond NJ9842 for the very reason that it seemed impossible.

Siachen Glacier

Glacier lies between the Great Karakoram Range and Saltoro Range. It runs parallel to the Saltoro range from North East to South West. Its mouth contains three important mountain passes. To the east is Siala, which ultimately leads to Chaplet and to its North East lies two passes namely Indrakoli pass(19,360ft) and Turkistan La (18,520 ft) both the passes leading to Chinese territory. On the Eastern side of Siachen Glacier lies the famous Teram Kangri group. Teram Shehr group and the North Terong group. Total length of the Siachen Glacier is about 72 KM and it terminates into NUBRA River in Indian Territory. Its width varies between 3 and 4 KM and is almost completely covered with snow except 2 to 3 lanes of blackish stones running along its western edge from the point where Lolofond Glacier joins it, till it terminates in NUBRA

Beginning of the Conflict-1977

It was in 1977 that a German rafter intending to undertake the first descent of Nubra River from its origin that is Siachin Glacier, approached the famous Indian mountaineer Colonel Narinder Kumar, of Indian Army. The German had a 1967 American printed map of the area which showed the Siachin as part of the Pakistan. Narinder took these details to Lieutenant General

Chibber, of Indian Military Operations, who gave permission to Narinder for launching of an expedition. Colonel Narinder later took a 70 members team and reached mid point of Siachin Glacier. He also climbed 24297 feet Teram Kangri. During this expedition Indians discovered Pakistani cigarette packs which were taken back and showed to Chibber as proof of Pakistani intrusion. In 1981 Kumar went back to the Siachin and completed a snout to source survey of the glacier apart from ascent to the Sia Kangri, he also skied down the glacier and later wrote all this in 'Weekly Illustrated India' magazine. He wrote *"There was not a soul there, there was so much to climb, the view from Sia Kangri looking down on the Siachin Glacier is so beautiful just like a great white snake.... going, going, going, I have never seen anything so white and so wide"*.

Pakistan's Response -1981

This Indian venture did not go unnoticed, there were reports and rumours circulating in the Skardu of Indian adventure. On 17th August 1981 Skardu Superintendent of Police, Mr Ali Ahmed Jan reported about 15 Indian soldiers in Chumik and Chulling area. He later searched the area between 26th August - 6th September 1981 but to no avail. In the early summer of 1982 there were reports of Indians again in the area with rumours of their raping four Balti womenfolk

Enters Army Aviation –

Pakistan Military Operation Directorate decided to probe this more seriously and asked Army Aviation to dispatch one helicopter in the area. The aim was to show physical activity and observe any Indian presence. It was later in the day on 24th August 1982 that a sortie was received by 5 Army Aviation Squadron, Dhamial, to send a helicopter next morning to Skardu

Major Azam was sitting in the crew room when he got the message for the sortie to be undertaken. He recalls that historical sortie *‘Our Squadron was already employed in the northern areas and I, like many other pilots had fair experience of mountain flying in the area. My co-pilot was Captain Sami. On receipt of the mission the usual procedures started like collecting weather details, fuel, overnight kit and sorting out few domestic chores in the short time available. The flight to Pattan and then to Gilgit was usual. In our jargon if you landed safely that means everything is okay. At Gilgit we met our squadron officers and talked to them about this mission into unknown valleys, so little did we realize at the time that it actually is the beginning of a long and hazardous adventure. Next day on 26th August 1982, we flew in Alouette No. 1457 to Skardu where we met Brigade Major 62 Brigade, Major Hamid Nawaz {later rose to Secretary Defence} who briefed us on the motives of the sortie. It was basically an aerial reconnaissance*

cum confirmatory mission which was to be taken on 27th August 1982. Whole day was spent in co-ordination like collecting of suitable maps, making sketches, placing of the fuel at Khaplu, from where we started our mission”.

Thus the saga of Army Aviation at Siachin started on 27th August 1982 which till to date remains the high mark of aviation support to field formations in which Army Aviation proved not only their flying skills but above all displayed an extraordinary attitude of commitment and dedication to see their brethren in arms deployed in an inhospitable terrain. Major Azam remembers the events of that day and narrates.

“When we reached Goma we again refuelled the helicopter and took off for the historic sortie about which none of us could have predicted at that time. We flew in two sectors on that day totalling over three hours of flying, we flew towards the passes and adjoining heights looking for Indian troops which were not there. It was windy and helicopter was difficult to control at such heights, we did not venture over the passes although we tried to fly over them but controls became sluggish, It was my first sortie in this particular area, the excitement of flying over a new territory has its own charm and challenge. I had just finished reading ‘The Great Game’ and while flying I could not resist paying homage to the pioneer travelers who ventured through these un-

chartered passes in search of adventure fuelled with the pioneering spirit.”

‘Next day we undertook mission in Khaplu Sector and flew towards Baltoro Glacier, looking for the intruders, meanwhile Major Hamid Nawaz made his own notes about the area. I still remember that people on ground would run and take cover on hearing the helicopter noise. At refueling many of locals admitted coming from far distance to see the helicopter, it was the first time that local inhabitants had seen helicopter. The major findings of the sortie were”.

Routes-There are two major routes available from Khaplu to Siachen Glacier, The important features on the first route are Khaplu – Dansum – Kurma Ding – Kondus – Kondus Glacier – Siala (17,100 feet) – Siachen Glacier. The flying distance of this route is about 145 Kilometres and 2/3rd is covered by Kondus and Siachen Glaciers. The last place of habitation on this route is Kurma Ding and no vegetation is available beyond this place. Second route is from Khaplu – Dansum – Goma – Gyari – Bilafond Glacier – Ali Brangsa – Bilafond La (17,000 ft) – Lolofond Glacier – Siachen Glacier. The flying distance of this route is about 110 Kilometres and 3/5th is covered by Bilafond, Lolofond and Siachen Glaciers. The last place of habitation on this route is Goma.

Weather. In this area weather is quite unpredictable, but the valleys normally remain open as the clouds usually cling to the mountains on either sides.

That was the first ever sortie to be undertaken for Siachin, the crew came back next day to Dhamial and for coming days narrated the sortie in crew room as high mark of their mountain flying.

First Pakistan Army Expedition- 1983

Sequel to the First sortie it was decided to despatch a ground expedition "Ababeel" as show of force on the glacier. Early part of 1983 was used for planning and in July –August 1983 one Special Services Group{SSG}Company ex 1st Commando Battalion was sent to the area. An Alouette helicopter along with two pilots ie Major Naqvi and Captain Shabab were also dispatched from Dhamial to Khaplu via Gilgit. At Gilgit Major Naqvi was replaced by Major Shoukat Masood. The Special Services Group Company was placed under command Major Aslam with Captain Arshad Rafiq as the second in command with Captain Doctor Aftab as the medical officer. This commando expedition was supported administratively by the lone Alouette helicopter operating from Khaplu. The Special Services Group strength was approximately 70 all ranks. Two Puma helicopters also took part in the operation

when they helilifted this company from Khaplu towards Sia La in successive sorties. This expedition being the pioneer was handicapped by lack of high altitude equipment such as boots and tents. All their rations were placed on two sledges and unfortunately one oil Jerri-can leaked and soaked all the ration less tea.

On 31st July 1983 Major Naqvi and Captain Shabab dropped fuel and other edibles at Sia La while hovering. This was the highest hovering at that time under taken by Army Aviation. As the expedition moved forward, progressively their administrative demands increased. Whole expedition which was now divided into three groups, one was tasked to move forward and the other two platoons started supporting this move.

Indians Detection 16th August-1983

Indians were present on the Siachin and were just few Kilometers ahead of own post but both were unaware of each other's presence. On 16th August 1983, Major Shoukat Masood and Captain Shabab were on a re-supply mission with Lieutenant Colonel Munir the commanding officer of the SSG battalion. Supplies were dropped at Camp No. 4, the new forward location of the expedition. After dropping the loads the pilots flew forward out of curiosity towards the Nubra River. In

general area around HJ 9995, Captain Shabab spotted two men walking on the stone lane, another person was detected by Major Shoukat Masood in area NK 0194. He was standing near a trench and on seeing the helicopter jumped into the trench. On the return flight the aviators flew straight towards Gilgit and informed Commander Force Command Northern Area{FCNA} about this latest situation.

Special Services Group had established five camps on the glacier and in next few days Alouette flew extensively in the area to observe the Indians but now the pilots were cautious about the Indians as they had seen their Ack Ack machine guns. Despite all this, own pilots were able to detect a number of enemy posts with proper helipads. On 21st August 1983, Brigadier Tariq Mahmood{TM} was also flown in the area and it was revealed that Indians had vacated their camps. Further Alouette sorties confirmed that Indians had ventured as far as Bila Fond La and had prepared small posts in the stony part of the glacier.

Landing on Vacated Indian Post 23rd August 1983

Early morning both pilots Captain Shabab and Major Shoukat took Commander SSG, Brigadier TM along with the commanding officer of the battalion to Piun, the eastern extreme edge of the Siachin Glacier

where the passengers were dropped and Alouette flew back bringing back one own frost bite casualty from Camp 5. At 1430 hours Commander FCNA Major General Pir Dad Khan and Brigadier TM were flown over the glacier and were shown the vacated Indian camps. They also landed at the forward enemy camp which was already secured by own troops. Pakistan launched protest to United Nations{UN} and on 24th August 1983 two United Nations Observers along with Brigadier TM were flown by own pilots including Major Azam and Captain Shabab followed by Commander 62 Brigade in another helicopter being flown by Major Naqvi and Major Shoukat Masood

Vacation of Siachin by Pakistani troops. By end of August 1983, the weather started getting worse and chilly with snow fall being experienced at night. Commander FCNA ordered the expedition to withdraw. Aviation flew last sortie on Alouette III helicopter on 27th August 1983 by, Major Masood and Captain Shabab

Plan For The Future

Immediately after the withdrawal of own troops from Siachin by end of August 1983 Military Operation Directorate{MO}, Headquarters 10 Corps and Commander FCNA got busy in evolving future course of action. In this situation following conclusions were

drawn. Firstly Indians would pre-empt own occupation of the glacier. Secondly they will come in bigger force to rule out the stepping back on seeing Pakistani troops. Further analysis led to believe that only the passes allow Indian Force to step onto the habitat from glacier and vice versa. Holding of these passes by Pakistani troops can effectively seal the fate of any conflict, thus passes became vital. Finally, own forces needed special equipment to operate in such hostile terrain.

A meeting was held on 8th October 1983, in GHQ, presided by the President General Zia Ul Haq which reviewed the whole situation³. It was decided to prepare well for the next year's venture, also support of own air force in logistic supply of the troops was probed. It was also directed that no effort and expense be spared for this venture and subsequently orders were placed for special snow equipment

Race for the Passes- 1984

Both the adversaries prepared hard for the campaigning season of 1984. On Pakistani side the two major towns of Gilgit and Skardu were experiencing hectic activities. There was a marked increase in the

³ Military Operations secret letter dated...

troops movement. Higher Headquarters had prepared well by buying latest equipment for this purpose. Shops in twin cities were selling all kinds of equipment mostly the left overs of foreign expeditions. In early April 1984 the joint expedition of Special Services Group and Northern Light Infantry {NLI} whose troops are all locals thus more sturdy and hardy than their plain counterparts, had concentrated at Khaplu. Following resources were allotted and earmarked for this purpose which included Head Quarters 62 Brigade, two SSG Companies, one NLI battalion, two Pumas and three Alouette helicopters

Before the Pakistani troops climb the passes that would ensure their control over the glacier Brigadier Ghulam Mohammad Director General Military Operations and Brigadier Ajmal Commander of 62 Brigade planned an aerial reconnaissance to iron out last minute details. On 17th April 1984, two Alouette helicopters flown by Lieutenant Colonel Kamal Khan the Commanding Officer of 5 Squadron along with Captain Shabab as co-pilot and second helicopter had Major Farooq Altaf and Captain Jamshed Bajwa. These two helicopters made a plan, to enter Siachin from Sia La after flying over the glacier; planned to return via Bilafond La-Gyari-Goma and back to Khaplu. On reaching Sia La, Major Farooq noticed some troops on the pass and he talked to the lead helicopter, which also

noticed the troops at another camp. They decided to return back after making low passes over the camps. The lead helicopter of Lieutenant Colonel Kamal Khan returned back to Dansum whereas the wing-man followed the original itinerary and found more Indian troops at Bilafond La as well. It was thus clear that Indians had reacted more quickly and were able to reach the passes before Pakistani troops. Furthermore Major Farooq's helicopter on landing was inspected as per procedures, few bullet holes were observed at the tail. These were the first shots fired by the enemy in Siachin Glacier. DGMO rushed back to the GHQ and informed the higher ups about this new development. It was decided to push ahead own troops as far forward as possible and occupy the heights opposite the Indians. FCNA acted on its contingency No. 2 which was hatched for such a catastrophe, which envisaged occupation and defending the next line of defences. Composite SSG Platoon was sent to occupy defensive position in general area Kundus Bend in Sia La sector. One Composite Company of SSG in Ali Brangsa was deployed to check enemy in Bila Fond sector. One Composite Platoon at Gyong and one Platoon of NLI was to defend area in Chulung. Gyong La was occupied by the SSG on 15th May 1984 and exchange of fire in same sector took place on 25th May 1984.

The Line Of Contact

By end May 1984, Indians had occupied all the possible passes leading to Siachin Glacier from Pakistan or China.

Indian Dispositions

Sia La. Kilo Company of Laddakh Scouts at pass{post}, Company minus in depth{camp] and a Platoon at Indira Koli {post]

BilaFond La. Two companies of 4th Kumaon Regiment were at the pass. Gyong La. Two companies of 9th Kumaon located at Dzingrulma.

SIACHEN- Diary of an officer

This diary excerpts are from an officer who was in love with a girl, had gone to Siachen for the sake of an adventure. I have omitted few words, this officer is rather unconventional in character as he has shown no inclination towards religion , his account and record reflects an unusual description of the area and the life pattern.

“There were many stories of glacier warfare especially of winter in which temperature drops to record

zero. One such myth which circulated among the new comers was that it is so cold at the post, that urine gets frozen the moment it leaves and had to be broken .On the contrary it is the warmest thing at such heights and its prints on snow remains for hours. However constipation was a common ailment and one of its remedy was to drink the Apricot Oil which was also used for bathing. The the major worry at post was to attend the call of nature. In the absence of any regular bathroom or water it was bit unhygienic but the real ordeal was putting on the high altitude shoes which totally drains energy out at such altitude. The helipads at posts are freshed up prior to the arrival of helicopter with the help of Rafhan Energile or Egg Pudding both of these items were in abundance at posts. Bathing was not possible at posts but at Sector Headquarters after a fortnight some body would indulge in this luxury by heating the snow. Within the igloo the only way of keeping warm was through the oil burner which would remain operative till the time its oil ran out or something goes wrong with its filament. Many accidents of fire took place while refueling it. Its constant black smoke would turn the snow white kit into crow black within days and noise would hammer the brain thus it was nick named as Brain Fucker. The major cause of frost bite was heating body parts especially feet and hands directly over the burner fire. The pain of frost bite is bearable but toothache at these heights is killing. Two jeeri-cans put together with

a mattress over it along with sleeping bag would serve as the sleeping cot, needles to say that it was like sleeping on snow. At times for days the snow storm would prevail and sometimes even in the mid of night, snow has to be shovelled from the igloo to allow air for breathing. You cannot stand in the two man igloo and some time days would be spend in lying position. In all this Army Aviation, helicopters and pilots were most revered and talked people with every soldier and officer having one odd incident and tale to narrate about the time when he had a ride in helicopter or met a pilot.

30th January 1988

Awoke up at 0800 hours could not get a good sleep, Salik{his old friend, who died in siachen} Samina{the girl he loves} at 0900 hours I was ready to go to Haji Post. Muazzam left for Ibrahim Post, said bye to Captain Dr Cheema, Muzzhair and Saleem Domeli. Climb was difficult, I was carrying my own luggage, 1st stop at Mortor position, 25 minute walk, then onward with three soldiers, saw crevices, we had to made our own way, saw one crevice covered with a iron sheet, journey was not that difficult till Haji Base, where a part from post have come down, I had given my luggage to a soldier. Weather was clear, in halts but there was a blizzard, I kept singing 'papa don't preach' took radio,

cells and TV Times, cards. Journey from base to post was terrible, after 150 feet of climb it was all snow, taking rest after few steps, we all were tied with one another, Maskeen was behind me, in simple words terrible, blizzard, tiredness, coldness. Everywhere it was snow, the danger of crevices, slipping etc, rope climb started. After 10th rope onward it was dangerous enough, I twice felt down, but fear of death kept me on. Two crows were flying below, Indian post was visible the three tops, finally after 4 hours I reached the top, the troops said it was an excellent time. I was exhausted laid down for 15-20 minutes. the Haji Observation Post is another 800 yards up, I have now got the mountaineering insignia. Went into 2 man igloo had telephone with Ambush Post, some sex topic, my morale too high, listen to radio BBC, Moscow, Australia etc, had chit chat with Naik Ishaq, Naik Rab Nawaz, had many cigarettes of Capstan, it is 4 feet wide 3 feet high and 7 feet long, terrible conditions. The snow blizzard was there, it rocked my igloo many times had tea, no dinner, went to sleep listening to radio

31st January 1988

First day at Haji Post, terrible severe headache again saw Samina in dreams receiving her letters with good news that her parents have agreed. Too cold, went

for a piss outside,the most difficult task here ,wind still blowing,at 19200 feet thought of writing letters to everyone but the ball point doesnot work,I have to heat it up frequently,weather was now clear,had breakfast daal paratha and tea.I cannot sit properly in this igloo,communication still off with base camp,many times I have to breath harder,quite a problem the door of my igloo is open I can see the one half of mountain all snow and one crow.saw newspaper. Conditions slightly better but still feets are too cold,here there is no sense of time or day only weather sense prevails, here morale is so so Jawan afraid of opening fire on Indians due to fear of there retaliation artillery, only two naiks and four soldiers have to protect this post what a joke they just want to pass time they are afraid of clear weather because then Indians start firing and today is clear weather.

1st February 1988

Most difficult night since I left Sargodha, I couldnot get sleep,twice I woke up due to suffocation, it was painfull I was having the sleeping bag in wrong direction I was cursing myself for coming here the morale at its lowest ebb.In the day remain inside the igloo went out for a piss too cold I am almost a pschyo

now, I talk to myself either of future or of past, remained on bed, sore throat and other diseases very difficult task

2nd February 1988

Went out at 1100 hours had a brush and felt better than yesterday again in the igloo my mind raced backward on Salik, it was too difficult to avoid him, it was my mistake to come as volunteers, every second is difficult only due to Salik memories I thought of Samina and again evil ideas came into my mind, saw the moon at 1900 hours it is full moon what a beauty it was cool outside remained there for 5-7 minutes, majestic.

Night

I slept without long john it was comfortable, loneliness getting on my nerves I am waiting for a positive reply from Sargodha

3rd February 1988

Got up at 1200 hours playing with my penis at 1230 hours an Indian helicopter came, I went out saw the area with binoculars, jawans too afraid of firing, had talk with Shahjee, Naubahar and ambush part morale high after talking with them otherwise it is too low read Pakeeza digest rubbish again, I went into fools paradise, had food

felt better slept very late, BBC,VOA, Moscow, All India Radio also listened to Ghulam Ali ghazalas on radio.

4 February 1988

Snow blizzard is going on outside,it looks as the igloo will also fly away,did not had anything to eat not even water,headache and light fever and flu and weakness,morale is nowhere you just lying on the mat,thinking of samina and death of Karachi ,must have something to eat

After 2 hours

Nose is running fast ,read poetry from digest,blizzard is still going on,too cold today,don't know what to do still 5 weeks left on this post ,I better lie down ,feeling hungry but nothing to eat,naik ishaq words are still in my mind'sir lets take it as POW in east pakistan'I think it is a better approach but this flu is too frustrating I look like a pow eating sleeping and behaving like animals on this post,well this is war

6th February 1988

Snow blizzard is still going on it is too cold ,4th night was terrible when I was lokining for water finally I had to chew the ice,todays its samina birthday ,got

goldleaf today so enjoying smoking,only memories here,I was almost pschy on 4th night curse myself a lot,condition much better too much weakness read saminas letter {old one} wrote letter to ibrar and sherbaz,still no letter ,all quiet on western front,no radio,here so lonely,feet too cold,had telephonic talk with ambush,mortor camp ,salman is in mortor position ,sepoy ijaz of 42 punjab looking after me well,igloo quiet warm,blizzard still going on went for shit,horrible experience,day dreaming a lot,only memories to cheer ,wrote a lot of letter,I just open the door of my igloo to clear my nose and saw sky full of stars but wind too fast and my feet getting cold as I touched the floor with only my socks

7/8th February 1988

Same snow blizzard remained inside the igloo went for the piss a difficult task 2130 hours,had talk with sajid adjutant,an official letter is for me I hope not 'your services no more required'here different ideas comes into mind,I was thinking earlier of writing demi official letter to general ,explaining them the problems here ,food accommodation morale etc,then to GOC AA command for monument etc,throughout the day I kept on thinking about Hamid uncle,seema baji shanu ,school days,aunty fari,haneefia burger,juices,movies brothers

,war salik Lahore,sami,marriage ,SSG aviation etc,getting pschyo at this time all india radio programme on Love real good,songs etc had a problem here,naik rab nawaz abused ijaz,sort the problem,salman and naubhar are sick,had telephonic with ambush,nothing to do afraid of lying for sleep.same food etc,today india radio explained Pakistan preparation in siachen area,I am thinking of ex Pakistan leave,food in Lahore Karachi,self inflicted injuries etc,negative thoughts,8th almost gone few days left,where is samina,what she must be doing now,I am getting crazy,I am always thinking of death here,I will die here I know god help me,again feeling thirsty too many golds,here all day the life film kept on running in mind you cannot stop it good or bad,I wept today thinking of my childhood than again the death hovered me I am lying in a grave and people are weeping ,my father mother brother friends samina ,yasmeen etc,what should I do ,lets hope for the best ,god help those

9th February 1988

One month gone two months left a good day went down,they told me I have ten letters but that proved to be simple envelopes,frustration have they got my letters,again poted eight letters today,lying on bed naib subedar latif asked for a favour,to show ration destroyed

in landslide,yes I had halwa,frustration I must control it I want to survive here

2110 hours

Mood quite good as weather has changed had talk with salman and viqar and naubhar,did not had dinner as it puts the pressure,feeling hungry now golds finished,wrote letter to tariq and JRK,put on the lower of track suit feeling more comfortable again thinking of samina may be we get married after all also career also coming into mind,fucks it lets pass these days and then I will think,no wind blowing igloo quite warm now,nothing to do again old memories coming into my mind I kept on thinking talking to my self on different subject like war,philosophy etc,here the values of small things is realised water food light etc,tomorrow I will write lot of this I am depressed,I have not got any reply that must have received my letters,what is the delay?i am still having running nose quite a problem and also breathing at times is difficult ,one feels too much thirsty in igloo only recreation is radio songs at this time

10th February 1988

Morning,I was sleeping when fire came after two rounds I came out ,the fear was there no body was out side rab nawaz told me to get under a stone it was too

cold,I came back into igloo ,total six rounds were fired ,no fear,at all.had breakfast read Men at War again fire has started ,weather too clear enjoying all this ,first combat

Night

Indian again fired 12 rounds in total and them machine gun fire,I remained inside my igloo well if I have to get a bullet why not in a warm place,weather hot remained in track suit had brush and wash face,in the evening had talk with salman,naubhar kept on talking about samina,read her old letters read three men in a raft good story,had fresh meat but I had dinner with halwa than embassy cigarettes same routine ,one more day gone my mind is on samina

11th February 1988

Nothing unusual weather is again bad remained inside have started 'Chancellor Manuscript' at night I was depressed I got no letter viqar has got four

12th February 1988

Same routine weather again bad read chancellor manuscript,no letter so far I am highly depressed I am thinking negatively I thought about ex pakiistan leave

,Karachi sargodgha even samina but with less zeal at night had talk with viqar than songs on radio twice at night due to suffocation I got up then unlit the burner but then it was quite cold night was difficult to pass

13th February 1988

Weather slightly better should I go for piss ,how I finished that novel last night,now lying in the bed K-2 has spoiled my mouth had halwa in lunch weather has gone bad ,Rab Nawaz was supposed to go down but no party from Ambush tried to remember samina but vaguely ,why not letters so far,yes they have forgotten me so far,it is life one has to survive all this,on radio listen to Indian communication it is almost 1500 hours I am going to have a K-2 cigarette,now I havenot seen my face okay lets see but samina where is the letter

15th February 1988

Usual sleepless nights suffocation coldness and pain in feet that has increased too much,irshad slept in other igloo went for piss/shit weather too clear saw infdian post with binoculars two Indian jawans came up Indian started firing artillery and Vickers,remain inside the igloo with ijaz and ghafoor kept on reading kane and abel,last portion where Richards and fretayana has fallen

in love and my mind raced on samina,a bit similar story,finished it by noon then slept ,noon was usual boring had talk with Dr Cheema,waseem,muzhair then with major haroon 21c 4 AK regiment

2000 hours

Put on the radio and drama was going on including a lady doctor and a man on telephone usual hello,I at once thought of samina ,same tone and way of saying hello she is on my mind all the times well 'if she really remembers me or not I fear not' well setteled at this post 15 days gone pain in feet too much I am going to have a talk on telephone with officers that official letter was pay slip I am gonna get the 1st letter tomorrow may be is it of samina?i hope she is fine that's all I can wish posted her four letters yesterday,too much lonliness here beard gone a bit too much tomorrow I may go to OP and will also start Prodigacal Daughter,I usually talk with my self normally day dreaming no fear of anything prepared for the worst

14th February 1988

Started Kane and Abel read throughout the day at night jawans came into my igloo quite a chat weather quite bad rang Viqar I am having the urge and need to go for a piss but quite cold outside slept alone a tough night

dry throat pain in feet coldness but have to bear this agony

17th February 1988

Weather clear too much pain in feet finished prodigal daughter I love this novel in the night I gave problem to to major haroon later on to CO 42 Punjab, went for a shit the best I ever had, no wind sky filled with stars, listen to old songs on radio they evoke old memories just relaxing party from ambush will come tomorrow

18th February 1988

I am thinking of going down after last night experience, the pain in the feet was terrible especially the right one near thumb, many times I cried in aloud and abused myself in pain late in night, I don't know at what time I slept in pain, in the morning party went down now waiting for them to come back, they are going to bring cigarettes, jam, envelopes and one letter... who has written that I don't know but the feeling of this wait and surprise is the major and rather only excitement, I was thinking of Tania the girl I met in the last days at Sargodha and had I got few days more I would have rogered her,, all kind of people especially girls flash back in

memory,again acute pain and smoke,weather is clear,lets have one more cigarette

Evening

It was Aleem's letter the first one that I have got haere why not Samina has written so far? May be it is all over or she is sick it is not possible ,captain shahid has got a son talked to Salman ,wether is clear,pain in feet too much at this time having Taleen the medical tablet but no effects,it is too much throat dry due to smoking again pain,pain ,pain,Night will terrible enough

Night

In my twenty four years of life I have yet to face such kind of pain , a night unlike any other of past,from 0100 hours onwards it was agony,I wished for death pain and only pain, I abused throughout the night ,couldnot even place my feet on feet as it was inflammatory sensation ,at 0700 finally rang doctor Cheema

19th February 1988

Party is coming to take me down but it was worst weather in a month,remained in the igloo lied down and acute pain ,no breakfast only Goldleafs ,read Aleem's letter again and again and remembered the day when he joined the regiment and how I received him and

the drama which was played with him. At noon commander 323 Brigade rang, I gave him three problems at 1500 hours I went to relieve myself, the most difficult one too windy too cold, I literally had to crawl till that place, my hands got cold feet also, listened to all India radio, due to that walk my feet got alright but only the right one but the left one remains same, may be after evening medicine it gets right, I remembered last time I was having pain I went to MI room in Sargodha and there met her Doctor Samina, why not a letter from her so far, I hope she is alright in Sargodha or Kharian, Doctor Cheema is taking too much interest in me, a good doctor still blizzard going on

Not looking for a night like yesterday

23th February 1988

Left Ambush base with a hope that I will catch a helicopter in time, the naik of 4 azad Kashmir regiment was in the snow boat, I was walking, we set out towards mortar position, a clear bright day I was carrying the ice axe, a difficult path a slippery one many times had to use the ice axe as there was no other way but again the face of death, too much visibility too clear what a life what an adventure reached mortar position in time, captain Siddique was there {Ghazni Company} had a good time with him had the tin mango, pakora, tea. Party from

camp one reached ,7/8 letters ,five from Samina she has not forgotten me all morale booster her parents has agreed and she has also cleared her gynae exam, all of a sudden life and Siachen looks different,helicopter came and we boarded like Vietnam American soldiers ,it is my first time in helicopter a good journey

At Goma Pasha,Iqbal,Waseem etc were there had a good war on food and bedding,pain is too much,read Samina's letters uncountable times,the mere thought that that her hands wrote these word were soothing and I recalled her slim and beautiful hands and the brown strap of her watch ,I thank God .Too many patients in 50 casualty clearance station,a young soldier of eighteen also had frost bite,kidney failure and broken legs,what a bravery but none to praise,there is only one bathroom,had food from officers mess,my three fingers from right hand also gone numb,too many cigareets in happiness due to samina's letters what a day,I wish she should have been here ,yes I love her,now I will survive these days, I want to go back to Front don't want to live on a bed in this area ,now at bed 13 in CCS

Wednesday 24th February 1988

Got out from CCs a clear weather settled in a room with Zahid and sherazi,good chaps received three more letters from Samina,parents of mine and samina

has agreed,Samina has send long instructions,what a day,at night listen to zahid on guitar slept at 0300 hours ,we shared our love stories

Friday 25th February 1988

Weather has changed it is now snowing all day just lied down ,Zahid of 27 cavalry and sheerazi were with me,read samina latters again and again enjoying this new feeling of getting engaged ,feets are in better conditions may be on 28th or 29th I go back to GyongLa at nigh read Saminas letters

Thursday 25th February 1988

A clear day ,defence minister came on a visit,enjoyed the sun listen to the radio at night wrote may be over seventeen letters and posted two letters to Samina today,hope she will get them , at night had a joint , Muzzhair has arrived he has wound in neck at Haji post, I got emotional at that

6th March 1988

Approximately 1100 hours slide area. Dead body of sepoy Ashraf of 71 Field is lying in front of me, the first one to be found at the end of the slide area his body is frozen, he is like a statue his body was found three and half feet under the snow, searching for other bodies, Lhama is coming on to collect all the seven dead bodies. Left Camp One at 0815 hours with Gyong Party, major Humayun was also along, captain Naubhar reached slide area, earlier 24 soldiers of 4 AK regiment were also with him, commander is also on his way from Ambush, Colonel Qaswar still in camp one area, two more dead bodies found awful sight, my eyes are still burning with snow because I did not wear sun glasses and now I cannot see, yet I read the six letters that I received today, two from Samina, one from Captain Mahmood and one from Colonel Basher and one from mother, got a surprise letter from Ijaz the brother of Captain Tariq, a highly motivated one, but emotional stayed at slide area till evening, got a snap of myself with Samina's name written on snow, heli lifted two dead bodies, one we shifted to Ghazi position, major Humayun and captain Aurangzeb did not bother to come down at bodies position, me and captain Naubhar were down, at evening we left bodies and moved to camp one, Ice on slide started to breakup, I ate daal at slide area and read old newspapers, in one was something about Siachen, In return journey I led the team, Dr. Anel was there and his relief Dr. Shafqat and Captain Nazim

I wrote to samina,father and mother and gave these letters to captain aneel for early post and delivery.Played black queen then talk to Slaeem cobra but saleem domaili interfered ,went for international flight and than dozed off as have to move at 0600 hours

07th March 1988

Early move and I took captain shafqat ice axe and new gloves,captain nazim was with me a difficult route fear of slides there , a cold morning I moved with slow steps in the middle ,my stomach was upset so had to use the path,captain nazim was too cautious while moving ,I kept on thinking about samina and further days,near mortor position it was very dangerous to move but then I took the responsibility of making the way, ice axe was very usefull in this regard,reached mortor position at 0830 hours,siddique my course mate was very hospitable ,tin fruit,pakora etc but at 1330 hours we moved alone for the Ambush but heavy snowfall blizzard,poor visibility forced us back,stomach real upset I went to relief myself but few pieces remained with my track suit inner,felt very dirty but couldnot wash it , at night had dinner and futile discussion with captain nazim he is very orthodox,siddiqui was too hospitable he slept in bunker and gave us igloo,I removed my inner and

clear the legs with wet tissues then a gold leaf and dream of saminam

PS wrote five letters

08 March 1988

Awoke up at 1030 hours no party ,wether is good had digest and novels and gold leafs a good breakfast then just gossips,party will come next day early morning,I am going to read old letters now

PS gone through old letters that has made sad going through samina's letters

5th March 1988

Got up late was doing breakfast with captain aneel and Naubhar outside at 1100 hours got the news that seven soldiers of 71 Field Regiment has come under slide we rushed to that place{45 minutes away} me and Naubhar walk down ,a massive slide we found out odd cap,rukhsack,jerrykan, but couldnot trace the men,a great tragedy a lot of hue and cry ,Colonel Qasawar came down from Ambush at 1600 hours ,I called off the search as I was the senior most nad weather was getting very cold and went back to camp one and had a talk with colonel gaswar in his igloo,he is quite frank and jolly

then food , I ate a lot then went to sleep,early next morning I was having the burning sensation in my eyes because I was not wearing the sun glasses yesterday,quite painfull,aneel gave me the eye drops and wet bandages, sky at early morning was full of stars a magnificent scene

4th March 1988, Friday

I awoke up at 1000 hours had breakfast of halwa puri and at 100 hours I moved for ambush I was not carrying the pack ,it was easy to move, a bright day had a break at 'Choota camp' then onwards two or three slides came our way, move was difficult without the ice axe but even then it was difficult anyhow I reached camp one by 1500 hours ,had lunch /tea there at night we played we played cards myself,captain naubahar and captain aneel and listen to radio and normal gossip,naubahar is also keeping beard saw old newsweek issue and newspaper,at night before sleeping I thought of samina for quite a long time

3rd March 1988

Normal day weather clear after getting up I went to 4 AK room and started reading digest in this process in this process I burned one of the sleeping bag with a

burner ,I felt the smell but couldnot trace the origin luckily an sepoy came in and saw it, major ansar was also there had lunch then pasha nadeem rafiq and javeed came back and major sulheiri and tariq from Goma,we had halwa and coffee ,It javeed afzal is too courteous all officers of 4 AK are sensible then at night capt sajid told me that I have to go to Ibrahim and then to Yousaf ,next day CO's orders I had charas with habeeb and It waseem was also there,major humayun of 61 Field also join us I told them aboutmy love story slept at 2300 hours a real nice sleep

2nd March 1988

I left with Lt Nadeem after lunch but said good bye to azam tareen of 5Horse ,muzhair and Irafn came to us in the morning,track was clear initially but later on quite a snow we reached gyong in 2 hours had tea with sajid ,wasim was also there then went to Pasha room we talked about PMA days ,had dinner together,commander is present in gyong he is leaving upwards next day with two commanding officers,.At 2300 hours I went to my room for sleep wasim and habib were there,smoke listen to radio etc thoughtabout samina ,she is on my nerves quite a day,since last I got her letters ,habib is from capt aftab unit he is still having the same old habits had tea and cigarettes and then dozed off

1st March 1988

Zahid of 28 Cavalry left for Chumik went to CCS

28th Februaray 1988

Went for walk with azim tareen in goma had snaps
,It iqbal was brought to CCS cerebral idema

9th March 1988

Party came at 1030 hours I got up at 0800 hours had a smoke,snow is still falling then had breakfast then used an old bunker as toilet,we tied up rope together an SOP in this area in heavy snowfall,myself and nazim ,I am without ice axe quite a problem to walk we moved at 1115 hours ,poor visibility had a break in the way rectified the telephone wire climb was difficult due to snow ,saw that place where I once felt down reached Ambush by 1300 hours captain Dr Cheema was there had halwa and cigarette ,captain Nazim started a futile discussion with DR Cheema,he is that type of person who just want to show his fuckin knowledge had talk with Omar,Viqar,Salaman,I will be going on 11th ,slept at 2200 hours ,no radio thought of samina ,it has now

become a routine,I enjoy lying in the sleeping bag and thinking of her

10th March 1988

Had to get up early due to piss,got two letters one from captain Shaahid and other from tariq Dada,none from samina may be she is in karachi,captain Nazim gone we had brunch at 1330 hours ‘alol okay parathay’ a rare dish in this area then tea with cigareetes,I dozed off at noon,snow is still falling just chat with dr Cheema then telephone talk with all sectors also got two pack gold leafs from rear,a slide broke off the telephone communication with Gyong couldnot get sleep had sex discussion with doctor

11th March 1988

Weather still very bad had masturbation in the morning just laid on the mat read digest,nothing to report,thought of samina after going through the story in digest had tooth brush today,clothes dirty hair dry what a life,okay few days left waiting anxiously for April then I will be with samina how is she,no more La Balle Dame sans merci.Praying for a good weather .PS Shikari det

has caught one Indian message that 'big bear will visit the area soon'

12th March 1988

At 0845 hours sepoy Fareed came and told me that party is ready for Ibrahim Base,I somehow other made the excuse that I have headache and I wont go,40 minutes later a slide came next to ambush-Ibrahim track a narrow and miracoulsly escapae.15 minutes later we got the news that three men Naib subedar Latif,and suleman and ishfaq came under the slide,they went to inspect an ammution bunker.We rushed to that place and informed major mansoor ,myself and suleman we conducted the rescue but couldnot locate the exact place where the bunker was and started digging with troops at four different places but futile,in an hour major mansoor was also there,it was panick as we knew that each moment is vital for the lives of these men but we couldnot do anything other than digging and blizzard started blowing it was freezing cold but we couldnot let these men go,it was comrade ship at its best,at 1600 hours my self and suleman went back to igloo as our feet were freezing ,had food and then came back but it was futile and blizzard was too much,

13th March 'Miracle'

We started the rescue mission again and started digging, knowing in our heart that these men have died by now, major mansoor was not there he had gone back to Ibrahim, at 1400 hours we started at new point to dig but no avail, we had lunch at 1600 hours as we were having the lunch we got the news that place has been found we rushed and till 1800 hours bunker was cleared only one ice axe was there, infact there were two bunkers located next to each other and we found the one but men had been in other one and we found nothing in this bunker, it was very cold and none of us had the courage to call off the rescue but we had to do it one way or the other as hands and feet were freezing with danger of troops getting frost bite, so finally at 1800 hours I being the senior most called off the rescue and any case I thought that there would be only dead bodies there in the next bunker. At 1900 hours while we were in our bunker we were told by sepoy Faryad that he has heard noises coming from the bunker and he had seen a man coming out, before we reached that area and all the while thinking that Faryad had illusions, the sepoy salman was walking towards us, it was shocking, immediately we started digging again and parties from Ibrahim also came down and later after two hours we found the dead bodies of other two.

Salman told us the story that, they were inside the bunker when slide came and all around it was snow

and white blindness and he fainted and came back to conscious after some time and felt himself living and he could hear the digging going outside and he also remembers when I called off the digging,he said I wanted to shout and did that but to no avail ,he had a nail cutter and with the help of that he kept on making his way as his hands were frozen and finally he managed to come out alive

14th March 1988

I reached Ibrahim base camp,it was really comfortable and now I knew why major mansoor went back from the digging,Pakistan –west indies cricket series was going on and I listened to ball by ball of that one day match,salim malik scored a brilliant fifty but to no avail

16th March 1988

1700 hours,eighteen men are sitting in this ten men igloo,weather is bad thus we cannot move forward,I cannot even stretch my legs as there is no space,it stincks of feet and farts.outside igloo it is 3-4 feet of snow,I have no cigarettes ,suleman is also with me he has to go to other post ,so I am smoking his fags,there is handing – taking over going on between 42 Punjab and 4 Ak,in

food had only vermicillies and three plates of that,I was too hungry,listening to radio ,water is coming in through dome on my head and my kit is all wet,now thought of samina,the only way I can ease my tension is about thinking of her

Learning To fly

I never thought that one day I will be a flyer although my father is a flyer but he learnt it hard way in early sixties. I was not even sure till 1986 that army has its own aircraft as well. My first interaction with army aviation was when myself and Captain Salik were in Rawalpindi and Captain Naeem of 89 Light Ack Ack regiment was doing the basic aviation course , Naeem was with us at Sargodha and he used to ride the motorbike very fast thus he was called a pilot even before he joined aviation. Salik's other course mates were also doing the basic course and as such I would accompany him {we hardly ever went anywhere alone}to aviation mess, the main reason was that this mess was the only mess that was serving food during Ramadan and as such there would be a higher number of visitors in this month.

It was winter exercise of 1986 when I first met an army aviator he was Captain Zia uddin {he later died in Sierra Leone in 2002 as a lieutenant colonel, he was part

of United Nations peace keeping force} And we were deployed at Sargodha base when he brought the visiting general officer, I was the adjutant of the regiment and as such conducted him ,he was wearing the green coverall and most striking aspect was that he politely declined our offer of lunch and instead took out his own pack lunch with Qasim aviation Base monogram printed on the box, I made a request and he kindly handed me that box as I was fascinated with it and he instead share the regimental lunch. I also learnt from him how to apply for aviation and other details. Later I had to literally beg the battery commander and commanding officer to send my name for the entrance test which they did with a heavy heart and finally one day I got the signal from the army to report at Qasim Aviation Base for the aptitude test, I took it lightly .I was having an affair with an air force nurse at that time and since she was planning to visit Rawalpindi in those days thus I very conveniently adjusted my schedule as well. I was late for test by a week. I went through the tests , another course mate of mine Captain.... Was my room mate and as luck would have it his own unit officer Major Abbassi was also there and he looked after him and this was one time I really cursed why I am not in infantry. I did not vomit but I also did not took it very seriously ,resultantly I was not selected .Thus at this stage I had used both my options of Special service group and aviation to get out of ack ack artillery and now when I started thinking of career I got

scared of spending all my life studying and studying in ack ack or artillery school. I volunteered for Siachen and it was there that one day I wrote a demi official letter to Major General Agha Masood to grant me another chance to appear in aviation, kind of him that he send my application and I was again called for aptitude and this time I prepared and my war report also helped me in getting selected ,this was revealed later by Major Raza Jaffery.

The day I got the signal was one of the happiest day at that time. My friends did dine me out, another reason of my happiness was that Captain Samina was now in Rawalpindi undergoing her gynaecology course and I thought I could be near to her as well.

The course was to be conducted at Gujranwala at the newly raised aviation base. I send my batman in advance and myself got busy in getting clearance from the station and its not an easy task for an disorganised officer especially the library remained a thorn issue as ever. I also got my motorbike a Honda 175 which I had bought from Major Mussarat repainted in black colour and also changed its tyres as well. On that fateful day I remained busy with flight lieutenant Tahir Farooq and Afzaal and left Sargodha at around noon on a 200 kilometre journey. I reached Gujranwala around midnight ,my whole body was sore, I had no helmet and it was difficult to concentrate at night on road as there

were lot of bugs. I rode from Sargodha-Chiniot-Khanaqh Dogran and then lost way finally entering the Gujranwala cantonment from a dirt track.I had lot of difficulty in finding the aviation mess as none knew where it is and especially at night it was difficult to locate the place,I don't remember exactly how I managed that but I was able to sleep in a room.

Next morning I got adjusted luckily my room mates included Captain Mahmood my old regiment officer he was coming from physical training school and captain Rashid ullah beg a fine officer, he was the junior most in the room. Army aviation did not had a proper mess at that time and this young officers course was thus packed in one block next to corps mess, we had the upper floor where as the instructors had the ground floor, we were six officers in two room set, thus it was heavy load on washroom and as per army tradition the junior most has to use it at the earliest therefore Rashid ullah was always up before dawn. For our food we have multiple places to eat, The corps mess was not serving us the breakfast thus our batman would bring it from the make shift aviation mess and for lunch it would be the haver sack brought by aviation mess and dinner in the barrack of aviation mess.

I had no idea about flying instructors or about aviation school ,I took them like ack ack school where one can get away with loud music and other young

officers gimmick, but here it was different ball and game ,the moment I put on my deck with ‘take my breath away’ and very soon I got the thundering voice of Captain Samuel to knock it off. Captain Tariq was our adjutant and in that period the life was not much different from the military academy ,he would have all of us fall in after every four hours thus eliminating any chance of any one going out of the cantonment other than Captain Naveed Bajwa whose home town was Ghakkar few miles away.

Aviation School and aviation is drastically different from all other arms and schools it has its own blend for instance no other school of teaching emphasis as much as aviation school on going to bed early and getting up fresh in the morning ,in army as a thumb rule all studies are done at night and it can last past midnight not that the course is that lengthy but most of the evening time is spend on social calling and real studies start with music and lot of tea but in aviation school the light off time was ten , in many cases the student officers used to study in washroom with lights on. in my room Captain Rashidullah was the most disciplined one sleeping early and getting up early too he would have a head down exercise before going to sleep highlighting that it is good for brain and to stop hair falling,

Getting Married

Peshawar

Broad Peak

Diary of a Liaison Officer, A diary was written by a captain whose name i have not been able to find but apparently he was age twenty six and , he wrote his account almost twenty one years ago in 1992, he was liaison officer with a Chilean all male mountaineering team for 8024 feet high Broad Peak. Here is an account of that , I have changed nothing from the original manuscript which i found from a porter at K-2 Motel at Skardu in 2012 apart from few edits to make it readable and to bring it in a sequence, moreover I have added now few additional data to make it comprehensible. There are few explicit words which i have kept intact. .

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Preface .

Liaison Officer {LO} is normally a young officer with 3-6 years of service who is attached with foreign military mountaineering expeditions that visits Pakistan every year their number can vary between 40-60 teams. The reason behind this LO is many folds, primarily to facilitate the expedition, to give mountaineering experience to the officer and on top to keep an eye on the team, lest they take pictures or indulge in espionage. All this dates back to early fifties and cold war era, and then in early eighties the war erupted in Siachen the heart of mountains thus it became a necessity's

I first heard about Liaison Officer popularly known as LO, in 1986 when my dear friend and cousin Captain Salik Nawaz Cheema went as a LO with an Italian team and later he had many tales to tell apart from a very charming and complete mountaineering kit. Salik and myself later went for special services group {SSG} training also but i failed to complete the course and he did, he later died as hero at Siachen in 1987, he was awarded with Sitara –i- Jurat posthumously.

Every LO has to be provided with a kit by the team and measurement for this are send to team well in advance. I had given my name rather volunteer few weeks before my marriage, my wife to be Captain Doctor Samina was not happy and by this time i knew

that nothing can make her happy which involves myself getting away from her, myself on the other hand love her but still wanted to roam freely and this is what was making delay in the marriage. Finally she agreed but soon after marriage simply went back from her earlier promise of letting me free for few hours every day. My issue was listening of Pink Floyd while being stoned and that was core issue. Thus when my name came for the expedition i look upwards and thank almighty for this timely rescue.

There was a two week training at ASMW&PT { Army School of Mountain Warfare and Physical Training at Kakul ,I went from Peshawar where as my wife was at Mardan, rode on my bike a red colour Harley Davidson which I had recently bought from Major Shakeel in Karachi.I rode from Peshawar and then took the turn for Abbottabad ,it was a nostalgic ride as I was coming here after couple of years the last time I came here was in 1986 with Captain Amir Yaqub on his Honda 125 and it was damn cold on that night. This Harley Davidson had a 125 cc engine and was not a good one yet its name had a magic in it, this road was through the valley and weather was excellent and I stopped enroute at an isolated place and guess whom I meet ,none other than Major Amir Yaqub who was going to military academy in his car with his wife, what a coincidence{Brigadier Amir is due to retire this year

2013}. I reached the military school well after dark and dead tired as well .I had a room to myself and there were few other officers there as well for the same course, my own course mate Captain Javed ‘Jeidi’ was also there he was married. Why i am highlighting the word married is because i was recently married and felt as i have entered a new dimension, where nothing as personal freedom or ego exist as such i was looking at all married persons with same insight. One feels like the difference between bachelor and married the way we feel about being human and non human.

The routine was tough and god one, mainly it was running and stamina building and there were also classes in mountaineering kit and ropes and knots, we also did crevice crossing and repelling, this was the first course of this nature to be conducted ,the reason was that many officers would volunteer but they were physically unfit to undergo the trek.

The other topic among the officers who were mainly young and had no previous interaction with any foreigners was around kit, team, money and women not necessarily in this order. There were tales of LO’s and the team women who stayed behind in the base camp when all other members have gone up for climbing and certainly a majority look forward to these; me no exception.

I met my own course mates who were platoon commanders in the academy notably Ahmed Hayat from whom I borrowed a khaki trouser as well. I have always idolised Hayat in many ways , he is confident in life and that is the major yardstick; in short he reflects everything which i would like to become. We were opponent in boxing and i think the only defeat Hayat ever had in life was that, yet my late uncle Khalid remarked after glancing the picture in 1983 ‘ he looks like winner despite loosing’ , i think this explains everything. Anyway Hayat was also married but happily. Pasha another course mate who is a relegatee of one term. He was very smart in the academy another person to look forward, he was bachelor. I always suspected Pasha to be a hashish smoker thus i was happy that i will have some from him but he said he had never smoked it.

My wife came from Mardan for few days when the course was about to finish ,it was a kind of honeymoon, I went I think on a borrowed car to pick her up from the city and had a guestroom as well courtesy of Javeed. We roamed on motorbike in the city having dinners and fun, I remember once I through the quilt on her and she shouted back and I replied ‘you are not going to die from this weight and she started laughing’. We both went Halfway to Muree on this Harley Davidson ,it was a romantic journey it rained and was cold and bike got malfunctioned while coming back, she

left after few days and after the termination of course I rode back via Muree. I love my wife she was everything that a man can dream, now after twenty years i still maintain my opinion that she is the most fantastic and complete women i have come across in my life.

Generally in army nobody restricts in sending officers as LO but in aviation it is discouraged as it takes away a pilot for couple of months, thus he delayed departure till last, the team had arrived in Pakistan and he joined them after almost a fortnight

Day one- July 1992.

Well it was quite an excitement to meet the team, lot of fantasies may be I am going to meet the professionals, secondly the very idea that people have come here to climb was soothing. Went to Military Intelligence-4, it was after a long time that I went inside the General Headquarters, well nothing has changed that much. General Asif is around and that forced me to avoid main road, General Burki died yesterday so most of generals were out, MI-4 handled me well and then went to Inter Services Intelligence at Islamabad.

It was the first time that I went inside ISI, with whom lot of fairy tales are associated, it is quite different

from other organisations, everyone looks like a suspected Kim Philby or Burgess, the presence of a camera in waiting room is enough to shake all wrong motions, went to meet Major Yousaf an unlike ISI officer {a good quality} had a thorough briefing about his work either he was happy to be good listener or he was too good in his profession, tried to ring a girl but then for first time in my life I dropped it because I want to go with expedition.

Ministry of Tourism

It was return of prodigal son , five el Escobars waiting for me , 'Well no woman no cry' and on top only one speaks English, Malcolm, Chavez, Rambo, Cheeko and 5th I have not given any name. My first impression after two minutes was 'Mr Cheema you are in trouble they have not got any of my kit, they are poor, amateur and non serious type' but I cannot give that feeling any name. Shyness , pride in uniform or call to duty or excitement of going to Broad Peak that I did not took my due money and till now I am spending at my own but it is not a bad deal in my philosophy, 30-40 days in mountains, rest ,adventure and hashish along with Pink Floyd. It seem everybody is sitting here only to make money out of them, the tour operator the cook who says he needs 7000 rupees to buy few utensils, well road is

blocked near Skardu, I can earn 300 rupees per day but I want to go there who needs money if I don't remain alive, the stories are coming into my mind , I can go up the peak may be, but out of them if they go beyond Camp 2, I will be surprised, as for myself I have got nothing to worry , seen enough of this world, it's painful all I want now is to go up , have good joint and listen to Pink Floyd ,trying to buy an organ maybe I can learn better at 20,000 feet. Only difference when I went last time to Siachen and now is that love has gone.

20th July 1992.

Karakorum Highway, was built between 1965-1979 through the three highest mountain ranges of the world, the Himalayas, Karakorum and Hindu Kush, since major portion of it runs through Karakorum ,that's why it was named as Karakorum Highway ,it joins Pakistan with China and is almost seven hundred mile long ,it has one casualty per every mile and was regarded as the eight wonder of the world, in any case it is high adventure to travel on it ,one passes close to Nangha Parbat as well. This is where our captain travelled from Rawalpindi.

0600 hours, had a nice sleep at present sitting next to River in **Bisham**⁴, enjoying the nature and its beauty ,weather looks to be pretty disturb ,its going to be rain.

Aryton Senna II, left Rawalpindi at 1400 hours, before journey smoked a joint and put on Bee Gees and thoroughly enjoyed own country 's beauty its too good, roads generally good, less traffic; by 2000 hours me and driver Gul had developed good repo listen to music and never before enjoyed Pink Floyd more than now, we were stoned and lone night in which driver pulled Gs, Toyota Hiace is too good, at times one gets scary also but its fun, the team enjoyed music but afraid of driving. I still remember Baloch Regiment Regimental Police in Abbottabad who got conscious of staring of expedition and very proudly blew whistle to traffic. Quite a lot of tourist here, motel is good upper floor is completely to foreigners; today's journey shall terminate either at Skardu or near it.

Met Captain Suhail Sarwar in Rawalpindi he is in ISI also had a good chat with Captain Rehan of own squadron, went to Marghalla to get joints and it has really helped a lot to enjoy nature and adventure plus music ,at times I get hard on and then my mind

⁴ Bisham, a small town on Karakorum Highway. Traffic is not allowed or preferred at night on KKH.

fantasizes, they wander around but confidence is shaky and this time I am without my mother's prayers, I am sure even now she must be praying for me now but it's sad that physically and mentally I am away and I am gonna do something about it while I am here.

21st July 1992

1035 hours. **Park Hotel Gilgit**, waiting for breakfast whose time is already over, sitting with Dario, Micheal and Hassan the cook , slept late after playing chess with Dario which I lost ,bad luck. Gilgit is more like a dry barren place, but one has to admire the beauty in complete context after 12 hours of driving through that hard area of Kohistan where there is no place to sit ,you find a place like Gilgit , one wonders at times to what is all this, Gilgit must be secluded from rest of the world before highway was completed and that must have been the right time to visit here , lot of trekkers around and in a sense they have lot of things common because they all have same approach to life.

Mountaineering is not a sport, I have realised yesterday neither its an adventure it's a complete philosophy of life, we have a common desire to run away from the hassles of world and to enjoy the peace

tranquil of mountains; when those snow clad peaks were visible everybody was relaxed , its tragedy that I cannot communicate with them more frequently, thus the team either remained calm or just laugh.

Stop in the way to enjoy the best fresh fish in the world and cool flowing of water, since I was stoned so I could feel more closer to area, at times ahead of Chilas it felt as these mountains have faces, shapes, designs, you can imagine anything like a cub sitting on top or old woman's or kings and if you concentrate a little bit more one can also hear the voices coming from history or past. The fast flowing water of Indus has its own charm, making waves which can send a chill in spine but it seems water act as a boundary wall to protect that heaven which is over there , no human being or soul could be seen there but then it's the ultimate.

Mountaineer in a way are more interested in rolling back the years this journey was a journey into past with every mile we were travelling took us back into start of world and this desire will take us to Broad peak ,just to reach the top and to feel whats there on other side.

Gilgit

An extraordinary city when you think in terms of the long journey and here at its end one only gets a desire to move forward to see if there is any other city like this. It is a true mountaineering city; all shops hold equipment to deal with mountaineers. Water of river very cold, just had the joint and then saw city with Pink Floyd on, I am at the edge of world I want to go more alone just me and nature and nothing else. Here mountains have charm where you can find peace, you won't be haunted by memories.

Many things have revealed for instance I was eating and when I saw Marco looking with strange eyes at Jhummar {mountaineering equipment used for climbing} and at 1100 hours Varo told me that Rambo has left D-rings and Jhummar in Chile.

Saw an American girl with Honda 1100 cc with all bags on trekking, ultimate; no it was the man, who was cycling through KKH, I think he was ultimate but must have many things in common

So far I have not been able to get out of the time lapse, it would be far better to stay without watch and with this I hereby close my watch, oh yes monetary evils of world to some extent are alive.

21st July. 1992.

1230 hours. Had a long sleep got up had shower and joint and now waiting for breakfast ,well slept at 0530, sat in lawn due to heat at night with a Belgian De Devardnze, it's like two strangers meeting in a far off place we talked of everything woman, sex, money, life, quite things like similar he is quite worried about his job. Met Qayyum, chap spends twenty years in Europe speaks fluent Spanish had an antique shop, a hut at the top where nothing is mechanical, quite gypsy also went to meet an English tour operator, had joint, talked of cricket and Karakorum enjoyed the whole night of a mountain town saw its evening at bridge half stoned and yes not without Pink Floyd waiting today for van to go to Skardu, when i get the van I move out.

1800 hours. Another evening in this mysterious town, its quite small, roam after twelve to Buddha figure ,one brain really stop working at this it was a wonderful place absolute peace these Gilgitti kids are very honest you find lot different people here from down country too.

Time Unknown may be Thursday, date?

On our way to Skardu waiting for van sitting in garden of park hotel trying to get a last kick for the way,

last evening sit in garden Rambo/Marcio slept in tent and on which Micheal threw water at 0200 hours slept quiet well .

This mountaineering bond is quiet strong rather all those who come here to enjoy this nature are one they are tired and fed up of this materialistic world they have left the comfort to face these hardships and they become buddies quite fast

Dire Straits is a good singer quite lofty hits they blend well with environments I tried to listen him once in Peshawar in room but he did not hit me but here he is amazing.

There are three boys and one girl, what is there relationship is quite puzzling and when you want your brain to work a little bit it's good to thought of them, there are four vip rooms here but why even here class difference; it's not possible.

Skardu

Skardu is the last town before one sets off for the glaciers and mountains, it is located at an altitude of 5600 feet and is linked with the rest of world with a single road, which normally takes five to seven hours to reach Gilgit ,it has one airport but flights are subject to weather, electricity operates for few hours in the day and

there is no cinema in the city and at that time even making a telephone call to down country was a problem. Skardu underwent a change in early eighties when Pakistan and India both started having clash over the mountains and glaciers and thus army strength was increased and Skardu is the base camp for both military and civilians

Equipment has become a problem nothing new is available and its going to be very expensive after lunch we are going to Satparra Lake for equipment but still the charm of only going to base camp is too much to worry about equipment.

We are staying at Yuk and Yat Sarai quite unique as it has lavish tents separately, certainly one of the best in Pakistan, smoke joint and then we sat out side in sleeping bags watching stars and moon and talked of life. We all are same but Marcio is quite a gone case uncouth is proper word, Rambo is true Rambo he does not speak English, all the time looking for Malcolm to convey but quite helpful and the one responsible for all this equipment fiasco, Malcolm the translator is normal ,Dario the life, he is Checko always smiling making fun and happy he certainly has a glacier like complex like Claudio who most of the time is lost in other world the leader , but according to Malcolm has done nothing in this expedition. They require 30-40 porters which is

quite expensive well lets see what next Hurrah, Rambo found someone talking Espanola.

Last Night

Sitting in Yut and Yak waiting for dinner shortly Pink Floyd is going on ,two couples sitting in right corner are playing nasty games quite funny and erotic ones. They are nothing but ruffian this is my latest conclusion about them, at dinning table ,immature and none a mountaineer ,they have come here but mountains have done nothing on them.

I am or will be travelling in 1992 with 1950 version equipment but well Edmund Hillary did Everest ,me on Broadpeak; its all quite romantic exactly as I had fascinated. I am very happy and relax no worries no botheration no money matters no heart burning or churning of blood at night, its very simple world which one has made very complicated there are is so much beauty over here, it's a wonder that world is so cruel down there, mountains star lit sky where you can see those constellations which you have seen in your childhood, which you always dream of watching in those concrete fucking materialistic mechanical bedrooms where you cannot even feel yourself, you shout in your sleep, I wonder how you sleep, is your conscious at rest; have you put it to test.

Mountains have that special charm where for first time you understand the meaning of home or coming home for mountaineers, this world is a workhorse where you work which you enjoy girl friends. wives, children, morals, ethics, codes, but his real home is a snow clad mountains, in a valley surrounded by lofty mountains all around and few are wearing the white crown where at night to see these stars where you can listen to the voice of water flowing where you can feel your heart beat.

A busy day lot of romantic things to do like arranging porter, finding kit for myself , wandering around ,transport, meeting and saying hello to other expeditions in restaurant, the people have generally same topic. I have yet to hear a single word except K-2 on one table to hard climbs or Trango Towers on other, legends do occur here, like old pictures of Wanda in K-2 Motel, slowly we all are developing a bond, people here are most humble which I have not seen anywhere , kids with pink cheeks , old men with bend back; one feels like sitting next to them and to ask about other old years, even the people don't have other interest , shops are very rare to cater for anything else and its strange that these absences are not felt.

Having a candle lit dinner switched off all lights only four brass candle jars and Inti Allamini on air and I told the waiter to borrow ceremonial dress from the gatekeeper and served us the food, Espaniols are quite

impressed and manager is seriously thinking of it having a permanent feature.

Next Day Time ?

Just solved the peculiar porter problem which sour the taste of 'November Rain' a good journey listen to Munni Begum after a long time also thought of events in case of my death, they were so sad that I change the frequency, but its not good that so many people depend on one man. Sitting in Dassu camping ground reading 'Adrift' a vagabond travel and feel like doing the same and I have to attend call of nature but waiting for task, fundamental lesson of trekking may be some day we all can live like animals.

It was wonderful to be at own, I finally being able to get away from team to be at my own ,met Robert McNamara ex secretary of state , there was a group of American, all over forty including Jim who climbed in 1977 Trango Towers and his pretty young wife, two oldies one slightly acceptable other beyond that or maybe I have not seen her with that eye, two granddames both doctors they are bit formal, or maybe this is how life goes on, when one of the granny opened her kit it was quite romantic, they all have come here to recall good all days, may be they are young at heart, all legends in there own time. Jim invited me at dinner which was taken with dim lights an ole Trango Towers

story with inquisitive questions ,quite peculiar in their own way especially when one is having hard drinks.

I am really ‘knocking at heaven’s door’ sitting under a tree having joint , variety of cassettes and nothing to do, porters sitting under shade ,enjoying cigarettes and narrating ole stories knowing the fact that hard days are ahead so enjoying this break, everything peaceful so peaceful so peaceful that its frightening , I am afraid , I don’t belong to this world , I have been living in a world of maniacs, animals, robots, dead creatures; wham.

I feel like a free man, I am sitting in heaven.

Throughout the day saw innocent beauty, how can I forget Fatima a 12 year old girl but looks like three year old but whose hand are more rugged than anything I have seen, and such pure innocence that you simply cannot walk away , the kids are standing by road, an old man may be hundred years old or above sitting idle next to road, few huts which in first look you cannot distinguish between mountains, the chilly water which tastes I have never known such clarity, tried to be friendly with Fatima and her six month old brother.

We are one hour walk short of Ashkole I want to move tomorrow , Musa the porter sardar is standing , looking like Moses and I have simply forgotten that his

father Hussain the old porter requested me to look after his boy please; sahib.

I did rock climbing and jogging today and it was good to hear from an oldie that you are in form boy and LO then in a minute narrated the old history of portering of Sir Godwin Austin and his glacier, of old customs and traditions of area, the instantly make legends thanks to all those books of Peshawar library so LO is staying one hour short of Ashkole, because that group is staying here and LO has put his things under a tree with shirt off to show off his newly acquired suntan, his muscles and the white heart given by his wife, LO is not concerned about his colour, caste, race, money, he is in heaven, he is playing with brother of Fatima sitting next to old man handing over all his money to Fatima just to see that innocent smile, he puts his Vaseline tonic and rub into Fatima's hand because it's a crime to see a girl like Fatima without smile and money.

So far LO is going alright it , his fantasies coming true. Excuse me Musa has come and asked the LO to please take cover as he will get black and LO wants to have a discussion of philosophy with him on this. LO is now going to enjoy and he is quite conscious in his sub conscious of US group and Mrs Jim ,so full action.

LO is sitting at a place where even the hen is not afraid of human.

Jhole. 2030 hours

God help our LO lying in tent dead tired, his feet are sore his back aching in uncomfortable manner, LO started the day in his peculiar fashion, he again slept out to see the stars and listen to some erotic voices from nearby tent, throughout the day he was very active enchanting ole Mrs Lyla and what and what not, he enjoyed the scenery took bath in chashma made two joints listen to pink floyd in complete wilderness and in same state went to Biafo Glacier and due to his inbuilt quality of born leadership he guided the Americans into disaster and in the end he was dead tired. Did climbing and for the first time in his life he was at his own and got scared and had to walk for hours and hours to find his way up. LO saw an eagle flying high in wilderness plus a baaz earlier so far he has not been able to see an ibex.

Oh my god even breathing is painful but LO has not given up regular joints , quite an expedition on far bank and LO has to go across in a pulley, LO is quite amazed he can perform wonder if even a bird is there to see, LO shoes are quite tight, his ass dirty, his mind free and soul free ,this is abnormal for him he is quite used to

fear and today 1130 hours of walk has taken many of his ideas back to floor, right now all he wants is sleep.

Porters are really amazing the way they tackle mountains and they are very helpful and friendly cook Hasan took extra care of me and I feel sorry for my imperialistic ego about him few days ago.

Today he gave short lecture to Americans on his philosophy of life, he was widely photographed but not invited for lunch which in LO opinion is masti of guide and as our LO is very proud he took off today he was fantasizing temple of doom with his autographed solar hat and stick which he often used to display his balance on stones bye LO my wishes are with you go to sleep.

Next day

Washing ass in glaciated water is hell, LO has forgotten the track, he is one thousand feet up than original track and he is lost in stones.

Two hours later. Met trekkers ,found mountaineering route going back, LO is probably one hour or two hour short of Paiju, he has come across a chasma{water spring} with Marco and Malcolm already sitting with their shoes off .

Reached Paiju, another Bulgarian expedition coming back true mountaineers ; with one women with a

provocative smile, LO is happy after washing his feet now waiting for dinner, standing on a high rock with Trango Towers on left with snow capped mountains in back ground, in front El Condor type mountain , river crossing in front everything at peace, LO has understood this route march and why people come here.

Today.

LO crossed river in a bucket and he was the first one to get on as soon as he saw Claudio with movie camera , it was LO's pride at stake, LO is physically not fit but he is giving the impression that he enjoys going slow , a fact I testify to that, but LO gets scared in lonely mountains but he still loves to be alone as he is now, he is enjoying nature , a bird an eagle often stops him for hours to do watching here sitting all alone in this stone he is relax , no pain which made quite difficult for him to get in morning but I have to admit LO has style he does not mingle much with 3rd world countries only G-7 group. LO is quite friendly with porters he thinks himself of modern day T.E. Lawrence and he does not let any moment go waste to impress G-7 group in which he is quite successful, LO enjoy Nusrat Fateh ali Khan qawalis enroute, well he is now scared but he does not let it show on porters and others, he wants to see an ibex but mere thought shivers his body plus snakes at places ,his heartbeat goes very fast just thinking of it.

At times LO thinks of his past but for moments he is not afraid of death only if a girl is there to see otherwise he wont put his step in river but in front of porters he is a born in water although in his heart there is no beat.

Today, don't know the date time or day.

On way to Urdukus after Paiju, last 24 hours were very interesting for LO, he enjoyed, first Malcolm vomited in the middle of night for hours due to which LO got out and slept in kitchen next to Bulgarian couple tent he was too tired to get early and see them off.

LO is behaving as he is the hermit of these areas, offering tea, cigarettes to all incomers, three Italians two British ,Italians were good , Agnelli and other coming back from K-2, LO gave them tips of travelling, on new techniques in squash ,of tourism in Thailand ,then came the Americans group, Bob and Arthur they invited LO to supper but LO said okay if I get time, talk with British, Jeff and Adrian, both smokers, on cricket, football , hooliganism, trekking in KK and Nepal, wild life of Sind desert, on origins of Pathan and Olaf Caroe, LO instantly asked them if they smoke pot, which they did and LO was really happy, at supper to US camp and there as way had a chat with Arthur 46, anaesthesiast in California whose wife is artist and LO was ocean of knowledge on Mozart and Beethoven ,said LO he does not like

Bach[Arthur too did not like}and that LO and Arthur looked as if they are childhood friend and then it was different that he was guest on dinner , he talked and replied on Muslim fundamentalist, future of sub continent, the process of democracy ,US Republican Party, the emergence of EEC especially when Mcnamara says I agree with it, it was LO's finest hour for his country.

Late at Night

I was entranced to see stars. Mrs Lyla 70 is quite unfit and Mrs Jim quite okay but Jim is nice guy and they have an ass hole of a guide, real pity and I also thought of Colonel Minhas my commanding officer. Just crossed Lilloka glacier it is beautiful and hears the sound of water, its scary too with small lakes in between, occasional falling of stones which makes you move faster and faster.

I tried to act smart by crossing the river instead of glacier but It was good for Lawrence of Baltistan, otherwise he would have been gone . Marco is limping next to me and no sign of Maolocm on glacier, Dario ,Rambo and Claudio all gone ahead, still 2 hour of walk left; got Zia Mohiuddin and Eagles to listen.

Urdukas. Evening,

A German expedition and our expedition are at top level of this paltaeu., lot of flies here quite a tough trek over glacier yes real ice , at one stage our LO started running due to his previous experience of glacier. Malcolm came very late and Musa observation is that Maloclm and Marcio 'Mutton' ,cannot climb up. It's a lovely place, sitting on a high stone facing towards north , you can see cathedral close by and an open glacier coming down, our LO's shoulder skin is all off and is quite painful , he is enjoying Indian raags at this time, he is now quite tired, less smoking ,his main problem is to find a good listener to talk about things, tomorrow another trek till Gore. Today our LO has been writing the sayings of Pink Floyd with markers on way and he has made Pink quite famous and somehow it is always common bond with others to talk about Walls, oh yes yesterday LO had a nice sexy dream after along time in which he was working in porno movie.

These porters are very tough and yes this 2 hours never seemed to finish LO is keeping time with sixty minute cassettes but only they were over but also the cells, here on stone are finds names of old LO of fifties and sixties and seventies, quite amazing one but there is hardly any change brought by time.

2 hours short of Gore - 2. Our LO enjoys the scenery ,tea and glucose and rest, an easy trek over Baltoro ,our LO today was quite fast, saw Puma

helicopter then Mashabrum, here you can see Broad Peak and G-4 peaks , quite wonderful, Malcolm and Rambo were behind, trek quite slippery, actually our LO due to Siachen experience is shit scared of glacier and crevices.

Gore-2, evening.

Getting first touch of cold air its quite cold plus mentally these mountains remind me of four years ago when I was having something to think about Samina, but now nothing and its quite terrible to live without any dream at all.

These Chilean are quite good in climbing saw them doing so in the evening its one of major difference they do everything by will where as we in army do everything just to pass by, secondly I do regret heavy smoking well gonna get cut it down, thought of Samina ,but not the same way as it was four years ago, but she is still the only one I love. I thought of CMH/MH Rawalpindi days and these thoughts make one more lonely to think what happened next, its not only her fault, mine too, but in end its just a shattered dream and I am one of those few lonely people who have are alive without dreams and it is one of the major driving force ,. I have shut off my mind to think anything, lets wait for the right time but a feeling is there , maybe I won't be

able to live as there are no more the prayers of my mother which can rock these mountains and give warmth even in cold.

I came here to find peace and this I have to find it in myself I am sure even by now God is not going to take care of me at times I feel like jumping, at Siachen I had a feeling of achievement comrades ,Samina. dreams, letters coming ,counting of days nothing like that here.

Base Camp - Broad Peak.

A very treacherous way from Concordia onwards , it looks just next door but took four hours over glaciated bridges met a German trekker and own soldiers in Concordia very similar to Siachin ; proud very proud ones.

Here at base camp are four expeditions one American, one Spanish another Spanish and fourth is our Chilean, USA and we are next door neighbours while others are fifteen minutes walk over glaciated rocks. Captains Aetezaz, Khalil and Ruhul Amin and Ali came over from K-2 base camp it was fun when 4-5 LO's sit together, general talk on kit. team ,women, routines etc quite fun it is , it's a good day. American and Spanish are at top of Broad Peak and expected to be over it by 2000 hours, Broad Peak is virgin this year but tonight

scaled by no less than six mountaineers so quite fun, Ali and Khalil to their camp and its very well established plus leader is very jolly, he came down in morning from 7400 meters but happy that his one member has gone on top and that one was crying at top. Other members at base camp, two did shaved and were smelling of Tabac , i had a joint and came back to my camp, took out my sleeping bag and lay down facing towards Chogolisa.

Night

I can ask myself thousand times to explain that feeling of night on base camp but words wont be enough, you are just lying with cold air blowing and pink floyd 'More' on air, Chogolisa the bride peak is the most beautiful peak I have ever seen, on my left is Broad Peak and on right is Mitre and Angel Peak, on my back is K-2 and you are sitting on a glacier covered on both sides by Godwin Austin glacier and far ahead you can see glaciers meeting and Bride Peak, so peaceful . First appears the moon in first phase, next to little K-2 and then the first stars of scorpion appears overhead Bridepeak and as you become aware of them you can see twins and than slowly night becomes apparent the moon , stars going down behind the little K-2 and one of those rare moments when you can keep on staring the moon and actually see it going down, by then stars become more bright but beauty of bride peak don't let you go away stretching from left to right and covering all the

Concordia in an innocent way, accidentally you look back at K-2 and realise that in between K-2 and Angel Peak you can see the reddish of sun barely visible and then the brightness of Broadpeak at top, for minutes you judge which one is higher right or left ,then in complete peace, you hear the water running under you and the cracking of crevices in far distance which makes you a little bit fright.

While looking at Pegasus over Broad Peak it takes time to realise that light is moving on top , sitting or lying here in sleeping bag I concentrates on that light and realise that these are mountaineers coming down from top, I don't think there is any other exciting moment like this ,that guy over there is hanging with his life, only light of his torch and beside god you are at your own. I kept on watching him, at times his light disappeared then re appeared then a second light comes from top for two or three minutes I watched this drama trying to get into the feelings of that guy. I was scared before this but after night i was comfortable, at night got sexy dreams.

Today till breakfast

Cannot think of better holidays only elmajor{women} is missing, got up early saw K-2 , Angel Peak Broad Peak all under clouds, marvellous scenes fucked up my camera roll, did little exercise. Had

a healthy breakfast, it's a sunny day , Dario and Claudio left for base camp one, Mario stay back; now lying in my tent enjoying Dire Straits and reading an erotic book out side its complete calm and peace.

Yesterday

Chantelle the French girl has climbed K-2 solo

Today

Chantelle has got stuck at camp 4,she has got frost bite, it's very sad to hear this, a model of human endurance, suffering the pains, two American guys have gone up to rescue her, what a scene, here nobody knows her but her feat has drawn people, yesterday K-2 base camp got small weather balloon from American camp ,three Russians have gone up to K-2, Dario and Claudio established camp one, they say it so quite difficult, all it requires is stamina and will power . Aitezaaz spend the day with me smoking and listening music outside, saw the beauty of K-2 under clouds, weather has changed with clouds hanging low, it's a rare scene to see K-2 summit in clouds and to think Chantelle is still up there

Morning

It has rained and snow but quite safe in tent all night the cracking of crevices were heard here everything is possible, you might be swept away in a crevice , in morning avalanches came down on Broad Peak, quite frightening. Last night moon was beautiful visible for a limited time, no trekking parties , I hope they all are okay . Read la revista de sexo and masturbated many times, also listen to radio, Olympics and Sri Lanka radio {last time I heard it was in 70's} today Aetezaz and me plan to go to K-2 base camp for night stay , its cloudy and rain plus snow and windy , a bird is sitting on a stone now it has flown away, Claudio has changed his tent as water came through, my sleeping bag is torn ,Rambo cooked the food, quite good. Marccio is a dodger , last night they listen to Viva Chile Meridiea, a morale boosting speech but It wont help to go up ,this small glacier is our world , gave my down trouser to Hassan the cook, who is now quite friendly, apart from water and human none other, can also listen to birds and to see them fly. Espaniol camp leader has gone to Camp 4, Roberto;s Mexican's wife's tits have been notched by a porter accidently. I do not recall the world which is downstairs in plains.

The only fear here is of death and I asked this question to Spanish ,how it feels to go up ? and they all have different logics but all unexplainable, that what moves them to go up and face certain death like

Chantelle at K-2, but again we all have a strong bond at least what I have seen and feel over here, anybody will be ready to help other. Russians, Americans, French , New Zealanders, Espaniol Swedes, its heaven without women or may be with women one can restart all this world again. As for myself I need prayers of my mother to survive over here like Siachen but only now I don't have dreams and fantasy to go up to summit.

Sun has come out listen to Dire Straits, Pink Floyd, Nusrat Fateh and Faiz. Could not see the stars well at it was very cold and cloudy. K-2 with all its legends and myth, oh yes there is no surviving woman who has been up to K-2, last was Wanda who died a month ago in Nepal.

Yesterday went to Concordia with Fida to pass the message for Constantin a Romanian mountaineer who has fallen and broken his ribs, for helicopter rescue , it was two hours going down and crossing those glaciers through water twice, but Top Gun music helped a lot to cross those dangerous glaciers where everything is possible . It took quiet long to pass the message ,way back took very long and at one stage lost temper and started hitting the stones and abusing them , by the time reached tent just felt down, had dinner in USA expedition camp, its fun to be treated equally and with respect; stopped there for quite long and listen to travellers talk, Mexico ,Ecuador etc, the four guys except

Malcolm are up, Chantelle is okay, oh yes listen to cricket commentary ; Pakistan is 207 all out.

Today

Its snowing heavily very cold very romantic night is dreary because of crevice etc, I wonder about people up there must be very tough, entertained two trekkers for hours one really longs for some one to talk doing nothing except masturbation and smoking and lying down reading book and watching snow falling with all white outside the tent , all alone here.

I am getting a severe ache up my back I am dying its cold I cannot see anything I want to shout I am not getting air in my lungs it looks as I am on a high ground with white all around.

Its snowing heavily for last cinco hours and all those naked glaciers are now covered under snow it's a blizzard all day in tent playing with cock, listening to cricket commentary which is quite fun when you have nothing to do, had fruit cocktails, now soup, I am feeling pity for team members up in this weather . Its all over Malcolm is stucked up in camp 2, where as in K-2 Base camp, Constantin with his frost bitten toes is lying. it seems this weather will not get over .

Night

Headache, frost ,snow, cricket commentary, all alone; very cold blizzard on way, I think I better piss out.

Next Morning

It has been snowing all night and my tent is under snow with heavy cold wind, everything is white ,snow came into my tent as I keep the shutter open ,well nothing to do except to get ready for breakfast and to take heavy clothes , a difficult task Malcolm is back from K-2 base camp but other four are still up and must be crazy up there, its glaring on snow you cannot see without glasses, my socks are now all wet but luckily I think I have another pair of socks also, I also intend doing to fix the tent ,to take off extra snow which I did by punching inside the tent , it looks as if we are going to be stuck around till sun comes out. It's raining with snow.

Since I am all alone so just talked to myself with mirror, its very funny making funny faces its high altitude effects.

It is a real challenge, man against nature, to survive ‘ now it all depends upon your determination to survive, to see the beauty all around. Visibility is 10-15 feet what a scene.

Night

Sky is now clear, complete peace.

Next Morning

Snow blizzard is on .

Yesterday, spend almost all day at American expedition talking laughing, Dr Scott is good so is everybody, talked on religion, politics, sports etc. Captain Aetezaz came; listen to cricket commentary which Pakistan won, somehow one gets a lot of pride when one's country wins, teased the British in sporting terms, Malcolm went to espaniol camp ,met Chantelle and Thor on their way back, Chantelle is quite pretty and the fact that she has face certain death a few days back ago adds regality. Constantin told me that she is quite famous in France and had spend four nights at Everest at 8000 meters alone. All day, it was blizzard ,Chilean are still up at camp one, talked to Dr Scott on how he became a mountaineer , had dinner with them, these guys like all others farts and belches openly which I don't like.

Listen to radio all night because otherwise I became scared, moon was out with scorpions , Broad Peak both glowing but in mid night weather again changed, right now it is very windy and maybe a clear day tomorrow. I might go to windy pass, I can hear the

singing of a bird it is very amazing, other day Captain Haroon told me he saw a butterfly and on advance base camp there are three plants which every one avoids. Fida told me there is a dead body of a polish mountaineer 100 meters down in glaciers with boots on , scenery has changed here snow everywhere, mountains glaciers and everything is clad in snow, yesterday all day long slides were coming down and even at night too. Lying alone reading a third class novel and listening to radio sometimes I think of life and wife but then I get both of these out of my mind no use at all, snow is rising all around my tent may be when I go for shit i will clear it dreadful thoughts. Later I clear it all, my sleeping bag has got a hole so feathers are coming out and I have fixed a paper there , I am thinking of a joint and listening to Zia Muhiyuddin cassette. Cook Hasan daily puts up a stupid question, 'what for lunch ?' and my reply is always 'as you like Hassan'. Did brush today , I look like a savage person but a peaceful one, at times I want to recall past, Thailand, Karachi, Newyork, Rawalpindi , marriage but then I give up and maybe some other times, at times I want to dream of days coming ahead but too shattered to think of them let them come ahead ,some times I do think of childhood but may be for minutes, one gets to know life here, at times I think of going to Broadpeak and this is only consistent idea I get, to face death and feel it once again like Siachen. Going out to

attend call of nature , its very windy and cold ,I have put up my shoes very tough indeed

Iqbal is the greatest poet of this world and Jinnah the greatest leader.

Change roll in Ricoh Camera but give up in Yashica, now going to have rice with tin vegetables ,cloudy but shinny, high altitude effects; no appetite. Book is getting better, saw my face in sunglasses; I don't recognise this guy, talked to him for some time. Quiet strange that our LO at times starts barking like a dog or a cat or he imitates person dying ; very strange phenomena.

Listening to India Radio, Kishore Kumar on air and they are rekindling old memories of which I am scared, like that one song in Queen restaurant in Sargodha linked with Samina of which I am trying to forget but its very painful because may be I still love her but don't want to live together as it is quite a responsibility and travellers want to be free absolute free no bond of any sort.

I have just bartered a few cans of food from Espaniol & American camp for cigarettes its all under hand, a big plot a Nnick Carter story , told Hassan to beg ,borrow or steal anything edibles which we don't have, only excitement here as it is complete peace, only one

hour left to light now, again blizzard just saw a lone bird flying outward from my tent.

Yesterday{whole day}

Constantin and Scott gone in Lama Helicopter{Captain Rizwan and Major Jahanzeb} it was quite a change to see a helicopter , a trekking group came with two very pretty girls, one with few zippers down but our LO is very strict he behaves just like gentleman, always expecting girls to make first move which they never did but I have to admit that due to LO;s conduct they do come or rather take first step, like when he was sunbathing on a rock all alone, half stoned with books and K-2 was making him mad, the girl do came to ask why are you so happy here and LO just needed opportunity, the philosophy of Gandhi ,Pink Floyd ,God all came out

In the evening he listen for hours to Mcneal the old aviator from Alaska then at night yes 13th of moon the LO made a joint took his sleeping bag and cassettes out in open and what he saw he will never be able to come out of that spell , he fall in love, bride peak he wept at the beauty of the area its peace he saw stars and planets just like...for first time in his life he came to know that few stars are close others are far, also he saw galaxy even stars revolving around others stars, the nine planets making a circle , he felt the earth movement, he

was representative of his planet and he saw other planets for how long only he knows but weak cells compelled him to go inside the tent and to fell into fantasies the cold air moving around the tents flap , he masturbated{his problem}.

The Chileans have gone to camp-2 LO saw them getting up, Dario is okay but Marcio was short of breath{Mutton}

Today

Had breakfast all things out for sun as it's a sunny and bright day with my beloved bride in near distance I love you bride peak, no woman can match your beauty and grace, thinking of going to K-2 today for full moon with joints and music may stay there for night.

A butterfly can change your whole mind.

A frightening peace yes it is too peaceful to believe it, last night I saw two Chinese missiles going up they were not stars but man launched rockets one after other with a gap of 15 minutes, I thought may be WW3 has started but who cares.

Don't ask me this feeling I am in heaven yes heaven and world is beautiful, good is far stronger than

evil. Many strange and sad happened since that stay of two nights at K-2 base camp.

On 14th August 1992, we celebrated Pakistan independence day, Adrian the Mexican climber with Ricardo were coming down from Camp 4 and four other climbers were at already Camp 4, I was at Spanish camp with Captains Haroon, Ali and Amin when we got news that one climber Adrian has fallen down from ropes, people at base camp saw Adrian through telescope making last movements and then he died. On same day Valdimir tried to scale Broad Peak ,solo, without permission he went up till Camp 3 and back, Chilean have come back to base camp. I met Valadimir and told him that he can climb any mountain he feel like, i am responsible. Other LO's less Aitezaz objected but i over ruled them being senior. My reason was taht if a man wants to climb a mountain than it is crime to stop him, effects of Pink Floyd.

Russians have left the K-2 base camp, had Yuri and Captain Haroon for tea while they were going back.

On way to K-2 I was less scared as I was solo but still lost the way and Antonio the Spanish photographer then took me through such a route that had I been solo I would have cried aloud. He took me through the actual glacier over crevice and that is where I saw a dead body on my right in the glacier sitting rather frozen and I was

so scared that could not see it again. It was the Polish mountaineer which Hasan had mentioned. Saw windy Pass, enjoyed two nights K-2 base camp with full moon music and hash. Enjoyed the company at Spanish camp where Rustam the cook is one of the most interesting feature he cannot be explained only enjoyed.

Yesterday me and cook Hassan had a commando action at USA camp which they have left , to have food which we had none and now I am distributing among all needy trekkers.

Most importantly myself and Claudio the expedition leader have gone different ways, I have already send the chit for Hushe La porters where as he wants to go back through the old route. Quite a trouble now what to do, well right now I am going for piss and it is raining quietly, then food and come back and lay in my bag although I was supposed to spend the night at Espaniol camp as they have women company there, and my/Aetezaz plan is at least to hear the voices from nearby tent lets hope that rain dies down to go. I want to explore the new path for going back and as such will not allow the leader to have communication with porters.

Two days later

I eventually went to Spanish base camp also gave a thorough lecture to leader Claudio on his shouting {all language problem}.

Right now it is a good break in weather after 36 hours of storm ,snow, cold, rain etc Espaniol have gone and we are really all alone now, only Mexican at K-2 camp, did nothing except to read the novel 'Firm' a good one listen to radio at night, play chess{I have won twice}see scenic beauty all mountains are now covered with thick clouds, lot of slides are coming down thought of Samina but her temperament is quick but I still love her, she is the only thing which at times props into my otherwise empty and blank mind.

Day and night with espaniol was good to smoke a good amount of hash , to enjoy the Rustam's talk and I still laugh alone in my tent when I recall his talks and activities one of the charm which has gone now, I had an eye contact with Spanish woman I think I read something in her eyes all night but no use now. It had snowed very heavily on that night and morning , all night as long as we were awake we laughed and laughed on rustam sayings,It was fun. Weather was very cold saw the forming up of it with clouds forming up on tops Chogolisa etc

Now despite all the suspicions of a nasty weather the team is doing nothing except sleeping and eating we have food of Chilean, American, Spanish and Pakistan origin and lot of it, we are now waiting for the porters to come and on 20th August to go through Chogolisa, Spanish burnt a lot of their stuff before leaving its quite

sad to see food burning, I plan to take all and give it in Skardu to army aviation I am now feeling like a beast no worry no work only a routine which now looks boring due to cold chilly weather I was planning to go to K-2 but now no.

Description of Russian Team members

Vladimir, the Russian team leader about forty years old captain of Russian mountaineering team , a fanatic who climbs mountains like kids, first Russian on top of K-2 and two days later went for a walk solo to broad peak till camp four, a fearless man.

Yuri, Russian doctor age thirty who is always smiling in his ill fitted uniform did nothing here except walking around and being scared of Vladimir.

Helene, Russian babushka always waiting for climbers to come down, interested in one of the American climbers.

Porters

Who are they, in fact an expedition which consist of six or seven members normally spends almost two months at base camp and these porters carry their equipment and other weight from last road head to the base camp and then they are given a date to come back and they do come back on that date. Its virtually the only major source of income for the local people, thus the two valleys that leads to this Godwin Austin glacier area have economic rivalry and subsequently they are equally distributed among the various expeditions. Expeditions recommend them to the other expeditions and bond is so strong that it is beyond imagination. I interviewed one porter Hassan and here is his life sketch

Age 62 years, he lives in Satparra Lake village, he has been to Kundus, Shepic Kangri and has worked as high altitude porter till 7200 meters of K-2. He is illiterate and he believes if he is good than all other will be good to him, he has eight kids, five are boys and three are girls, he also has three brothers and three sisters and they solve all their problems among themselves and have never gone to any court or police station. On marriage ceremony he has to treat whole village for four days, the average age of girl getting married is sixteen and there is no dowry rather girl gets some jewellery from her parents. He has married three times and his daughter is younger than his grandson. and in this village I found lot

of kids but very few grown up men{I wonder on their sexual cycle}

A porter is paid \$ 6 once and then \$ 4 daily. In my expedition I had forty porters and I paid them for six days food and five days working money. Just for calculation the food for forty porters weighed three hundred kilograms, all this is in light of ministry of tourism directives, thus porters instead of getting food from the team gets money and they carry their own food. i paid these forty porters rupees six thousand for the kit and rupees forty thousand as wages excluding food and for eleven days food the amount was rupees 13,200.Each porter is supposed to be provided with 4.224 kilogram of atta .There is a sardar of porters who looks after their discipline and distribute weight among them, each porter carry 25 kilogram of weight and it is weighed daily.

Having said all this, they are the most splendid, reliable, trustworthy, and cheerful. people on this side of earth.

Cook

The most important person in the team, he is again a local but highly specialised in his field, in my team Hassan was the cook and he was a young man ,but in case of Spanish team the Rustam was an old hand. the cook generally buys all the stuff and utensils from Skardu and calculates how much fuel he requires ,we

took five jerricans of furnace oil, which comes to 125 litres. Cook establishes kitchen and that kitchen remains the hub of all activity, all edibles which team has brought with them from their home and other which they have bought in Pakistan is placed here and its cook responsibility to manage this. Generally the breakfast consist of cereal and powdered milk and lunch is not taken rather dinner is them made with pulses and soup is integral to it. since there is nothing fresh everything is tinned or pulses and rice thus this is where cooks mastery comes in and I can vouch that Rustam on the day when Spanish received their families made six or seven dishes all using same ingredients. Cook is paid quite reasonably and certain cooks are booked by teams well in advance.

Rustam was an energetic native cook in mid forties{ i was in mid twenties}, he was native, experienced old hand in mountain expeditions, wore bright colour coverall. We liasion officers were all raw. My {Chilean} and Capitan Itezaz {Spanish} expeditions camp were ten minutes trek from each other on Godwin Austin glacier. Naturally we both were spending time more with each other and this Rustam did not approved. Rustam had other quality, he was master in deception, he would cook the same food daily but on inquiry would smilingly give it a new name every dinner. Rustam had two wives and one day his brother in law who was

a porter himself, walked by. He had a break, i offered him a cup of tea which Rustam did not like, anyway to cut a long story short, the porter complained of headache and that was the last thing which Rustam wanted to hear, he gave him aspirin and with his typical half smile said ' well yours will be gone in few hours but what about me.....

How An expedition Works

The way people desires to go to Mecca or Jerusalem in the same way a mountaineer always desired to come to this fabulous place where four of world's fourteen highest peaks are located next to each other. There are teams which are highly sponsored by companies for various reasons and they only sponsored those who have big names among them, the mountaineers like Chantelle , Messener, Wanda ,and then there are teams again highly sponsored for other reasons because they may set new precedents, then there private teams which consist of members who have paid for themselves and then there are like my Chilean team which was basically a university team sponsored by Alitalia and few others in Chile to promote mountaineering. Thus on their financial strength depends their way of working, teams have been employing over hundred porters, they have satellite telephones as the

Swedes had in the K-2 base camp and reported directly to their television and then there were Russians who simply had nothing. In any case they get the permission from Pakistan ministry of tourism for climbing a certain peak and pay the royalty and then get in touch with a tour operator who books their hotel rooms in Rawalpindi and generally arranges transport as well apart from cook. Since Liaison Officer is an official requirement thus tour operator cannot do anything without him and you cannot make any prediction about a young officer, he if he likes can waive off any thing but in majority of case he will go by the book and you cannot convince him of anything .

There is always a rift in majority of the cases between the LO and the team, for a starter the team most likely would have brought a wrong size kit for him which again is not their fault in majority of the cases as most likely they received the measurement too late or not at all, then LO is paid a certain amount which comes to almost \$10 a day and that is a good amount of money provided he then makes arrangement for his own food, money is meant for this purpose but with this comes an unseen dividing line between the team and the LO, this is an inherent flaw in money it creates this .

An expedition also deposit money for helicopter evacuation in case they required and this is done by Army Aviation Corps which has one squadron based in Skardu ,this is primarily meant to support the troops

deployed in these mountains, In old days the message for evacuation was carried by hand from base camp by the cook to nearest village and now it is done through the wireless of army unit located on the glacier.

Ali Camp - Concordia Glacier.

Adios K-2, Broadpeak, Concordia and all that is legend and myth, sitting here at Ali camp walked four hours all glaciated, last night stayed at Concordia and saw K-2, Broadpeak in starlit night maybe for the last time, had good chat with trekking group went to army camp, gave them extra ration well there was quite a row between Hassan the cook and Ali the porter sardar {Anthony Quinn} over who to be sardar finally porters threatened and then begged Hassan not to be their sardar

Three Americans did climb K-2 {True/False} but two have been evacuated by lama helicopter yesterday, they helicopters had a circle over broad peak, Rustam and Aetezaz had a bit of adventure while coming as they forgot the way, I laughed a lot when I imagine Rustam's action. From here K-2 or Broad Peak are not visible only Chogolisa and Gasherbrum series are visible, it's a solid glacier may be the first one I have

seen with lot of deadly crevices, this La is only three years old, the sardar wants to leave at 0400 and as I am quite weak in packing and unpacking so I have decided on little adventure, to sleep without tent and I am firm that tomorrow I won't lag behind, it's better to stick with a porter and they are really amazing men, they jump across crevices with 25 kilogram load where even I hardly manage and all are not young but mix, well yesterday saw telephone wire and a mule, quite new things the best sound I heard is the crushing of snow under shoes crunch crunch, my fingernails are dead black with dirt, may be today Captain Ruhul Amin joins me let's hope.

I have a mix feeling on going back frankly no feeling at all rather I would love to have that same feeling which I had four years ago but I know it won't occur although I wish madly for that one, because that was feeling of love but life will not be stable once I get down but who cares now. Both sardar and cook are now taking extra care of me after yesterday's affair.

The Gondogoro La

I walked behind others and soon we got at the base of the pass and started climbing, there was hardly any need of having any crampons, in the mid I got the first jolt when an avalanche came down and I realised that it's not over yet, by another four hours I was at the

top of the La, and even today I exactly remembers my feelings, I wanted to cry, I wanted to hit myself , I simply wished that some bone of mine to be broken so I can stay here because as I looked down at the other side of the La , it was not snow neither there was any track, it was simply a sheer fall, a jagged rock which was at least two thousand to three thousand feet steep and I had to descend, there was no other way, the porters were expertly going down and soon I was the last one to start descending because there was no other option, I was able to hide my fear from the others and for next three hours which were the longest one, I had absolutely nothing in my mind, I simply forgot about any kind of music or philosophy and was concerned about my steps and grips and followed the steps of porters

As I reached the foot step I had a sigh of relief and pride in myself and after half an hour walk I saw a scene which till to date I remembers very vividly, there was one stone hut ,the first one which I had seen since we left the K-2 and inside were one man and one woman, both Europeans, it was fantastic and most isolated hut on this gods earth

We walked and walked and soon our steps touched the grass and by evening we were near a river, where there was another hut being run by a local and it had tea and few other edibles ,the hut had an array of

post cards being sent from all over the world, we pitched there and spend the night

Next day we walked and soon hit the first habitat a village and from there we got few jeeps and started our journey for Skardu. In the jeep I met two one British couple the man was from Yorkshire and her friend was a nurse in Saudi Arabia and she was also from England, they educated me about Roger Water's 'Radio Kaos'. We camped at night at a green pasture and had the festive with the porters, I offered hash to the couple which they readily accepted

We reached Skardu safe and sound and made payments to porters and were duly informed that due to bad weather there are no flights and more importantly the Karakorum highway is blocked because there has been a slide and furthermore there has been some killing that has taken place and thus all night journeys are closed and there are no transport available

At night I was keen to meet Aetezaz thus I almost walked ten miles to park Hotel near airport, I think I got the some lift enroute.

Aetezaz was full of stories the most interesting was that he had screwed the old Spanish lady right in the middle of the trek and was doing the same for last two nights, and last night he locked his door and forgot the keys inside and had to walk back through the dicey slim

outer path to reach back his room and entered through the window.

The Journey Back

After two days of waiting the team got impatient but more than them I was looking forward for a last adventure, the Spanish team had left by the aircraft which operated after a lapse of a week, there was one old bus available in the city and through Hassan I got that bus booked and convinced the team leader that this is our best way of getting down to plains, and in the process I met three Italians one was Paola the cute woman and then Lalo and third I have forgotten, they requested me to accommodate them on this bus and they are willing to pay the fare and how can I resist the company of such a beautiful woman ,thus we were now five Chileans ,three Italians and myself along with Hassan the cook, to make this adventure a bit more thrilling I decided to leave the Skardu at noon time which will thus make us travel at night on this treacherous mountain road, almost all less the driver were against this but in the end we started the journey , the bus was a small bus yet it was old and we all jumped through out the way.

After three hours of journey we were stopped by the police at a halt and informed that we cannot travel and must stay for another couple of hours, I knew it beforehand that we will be stopped and had to wait for wee hours before we can commence our journey, thus in a picnic mood I stopped at the only local motel, in fact I was the only one in that picnic or thrill mood and had a roasted chicken which took ages to roast ,the team leader lost his temper but there was nothing he can do ,his mood came normal after having the chicken. To cut a long story short, we reached Rawalpindi next night and lodged in the same hotel which was called little Holiday Inn. Spanish team was also staying in this hotel and so did the Italians.

The Last Days

The very next morning at the breakfast table I met the Spanish team and looked at the Adi with a new look, it is different when you know a woman has screwed in the mountains and I fancy my chance, after all I did not wanted to miss the boat and I was also interested in the Italian girl Paola, whom and when and would it be possible , these were the big questions.

The Spanish requested that that they wanted to have a sight seeing of the city and I proposed that they can go with me to Peshawar and see that old city and also have a look at my place and they agreed and we drove in a rented van, there were six or seven Spanish team members and I gave the front seat to Tonio and sat with Adi in the rear, the driver was a pathan himself and drove the van like all pathan drivers,fearlessly , recklessly and fast. Tonio reaction later were ‘ I felt like I am sitting in a James Bond movie’ .I had little conversation with Adi and she said she wants some hasish, which I was happy to hear and guided her not to take back to her country but can smoke as much as she wants in remaining two days which they had here in Pakistan.

Any way I took them straight to my one room quarter where my wife was living and she was back from office and was surprised and happy to see me and so was I, the team had a tour of the city and courtesy to that driver had wonderful time, the world has changed in these years, at that time there was no fear of any kind of attack or threat, we drove back at night to Rawalpindi.

Rambo was trying to get free with the Spanish leader daughter Christina and later after dinner ,the Adi said she wants to come to my room for smoking hasish, I requested the team member and I forgets who was my

room mate to get himself adjusted in other room and he did but with a quizzing look.

Adi came and soon we had one fag and another and then she kissed me or I kissed her first ,I don't remember but that is how it happened and we spend the night together, next morning she went back to her room and then on last night same routine was applied and then on next morning she left with the team for Madrid and very next day my team also left for Chile via Italy and I think the Italians also left with them. Paola took me upstairs in lift and said thank you for everything and despite our mutual affection we could not even embrace each other for good bye.

That was the end of my sojourn as Liaison Officer, I stayed for few days in Rawalpindi and got American and Spanish visa ,why?, because I had decided in the mountains while sitting and staring at K-2 and contemplating on life and world , that I cannot live here and I should go to a country where no one knows me and I should know none and then start a new life and see how life goes on, that was the scarlet thread, and you will read more about it in next diary which deals with that episode.

Recollections.

After spending over six weeks with the foreign mountaineering expeditions my own view is that, no liaison officer to have the option of either having food with the team or getting cash in dollars from them. It kills the true spirit of mountaineering when you get indulge in money, it creates distance between the team and the LO. I have seen and felt bad when all liaison officers were having meal separately normally after the team has taken it. They were unable to offer anything to anyone. I recall how Ruhul Amin on dinner took out a jar of pickles from somewhere under the table from a mass of jars , the Swedish girl ask him in very quizzing way ‘ why don’t you hide it and Amin answered “ the cook will eat it’; i after spending time in West could feel the bewilderment on her face. Kit is a delicate and very touchy issue, i had other reasons not to bothered about it but for young officers it was an grave issue. One of the LO refused to take his team forward for not bringing the crampons. A LO is an ambassador of his country.

Epilogue.

That is the end but luckily I found the captain’s diary of his later day tales. Did he met Christina and what happened at Madrid did he escaped from the drug smugglers of Stalingrad?.

Spain, France & England

Multan

Army Mountaineering Expedition Leader

It is one of those events which are unexplainable, how else one can explain myself becoming the leader of Pakistan Army Expedition in 1998 and at that time I did not even knew how to tie a rope, this is the story of that expedition to Passu 7496 meter

I was in Quetta 4 army aviation squadron and performing my duties as a flight commander and living a contented and happy life, I was recently blessed with a loving daughter, our second child and life was going in a routine and I was looking for some adventure and in this I came across an official letter that volunteers are required for an army mountaineering expedition, and without any hesitation I put forward my name without informing my wife; who after my 1992 experience was not even ready to listen to this word mountain. weeks later I got a telephone call from an officer who was representative of army mountaineering and physical warfare school, he was in Quetta and I went for the interview which was a formality and after another week I received an army signal informing me that I have been selected for the expedition and I should report in June at

Abbottabad .Naturally my wife was furious over this but there was little she could do other than to refuse coking food which in any case she was not doing .

I had a nostalgic and romantic feeling about going to the mountains, I had read Messner's books and thought myself of same breed and was determined to go up the mountains, I made two bags for the journey to mountains and took them as a paid holiday indeed ,by that time I had got my high altitude jersey from ordnance depot and was keen to try the old army clothing and to feel part of Great Game, I had no idea where Passu Peak was.

I reached Rawalpindi from Queeta by train and from there I got on a bus to reach Abbottabad ,my batman had already moved there with my luggage.

The team was a mixture of raw and experienced officers and soldiers. We were ten members five officers ,one JCO and four soldiers, out of them three had never seen any mountain, three had been on top of seven thousand meters ,one Captain Iqbal had been at Everest as well {not on top}, he years later died on K-2, three were locals, and so on were the similarities, the team doctor had been with several expeditions, thus as a broad outline the experienced one knew what is in store and raw had no idea.

The PT school had recently undergone two scandals one involved an expedition team expenditures and other involved a lady but not related to the expedition, thus there was an air of strict military discipline. Yet for initial one week nothing happened except we would go for our morning PT that included running and that's all, about other mountaineering activity like repelling etc it was decided that we would go to Swat area and climb an actual peak but it never materialised because it was decided that we should rather leave Abbottabad early and carry out these training on the spot, that is at base camp of Passu, yet we spend almost three weeks in PT school in doldrums, although we got our kit issued and had few periods of knots tying which at least I knew nothing and was unable to tie any knott, what we shared in this period were stories of mountains, the old hands narrating of Wanda, Messener and so forth, how Atta lost his way on the summit of Nanga Parbat. I think this needs a bit of elaboration .In 1989 there was an army expedition team for Nangha Parbat which included Colonel Sher Khan and Flight Lieutenant Atta as well, as the tale goes Atta while attempting to climb or after summit was coming down when he was engulfed in a storm and he dug a hole and spend a night without any heating or bivouac and when everyone had thought that he is dead he was seen walking down.

On personal level I enjoyed meeting old course mates in PMA where only Pasha was there, Khalid Shahbaz was doing brigade major in Nowshehra thus I went to meet him as well , it was football World Cup 1998 and I saw few matches with him .The PT school had a good library of old sports magazine and I read and relished cricket .

One fine evening under the influence of hash, I finally decided that I will be following Messener's foot step and with these thoughts I went for a kind of trek in the adjacent hills, instead of going through normal path I choose a different path and on my first descend I found myself landing on hard stones after I had just put the feet, the bushes with which I was holding simply gave way due to overnight rain. I had extreme pain in my left feet and soon I realised that I cannot walk but I had to, thus it took me three hours of crawling to reach the road and then I got a van and reached room ,not even having enough strength to visit the medical room for inspection .Later it was revealed that its not a fracture but a sprain

Retirement

The day finally came when the letter for retirement came and it was shocking because I never thought that I will also retired ; similar were and are the feelings of almost all army officers irrespective of rank. We all know that one day this all will come to an end yet it is something which one perceives to be destiny of others and not of himself. Retirement or retired officer is one word which none likes to hear or read yet a bitter reality. In my service I think it was only in the last year that I realised that I can happen to me otherwise I never considered it worth contemplating.

We are scared of retirement at least majority of us army officers very few looks forward to this day. There are many reasons for this foremost is the love of military life, a life has been spend in it , now how can it be left like this , what will happen to the regiment ? who is going to finish the unfinished projects ? above all how can army work or survive without me , at least I was worried about the last equation. I considered myself indispensable to army, atleast for the whole journey I always considered myself to be ever willing for any task of national level and now I am retiring. These were my feelings , an average officer and one can imagine the feelings of senior officers. It is in this context that one should see the reasons why General Kayani the last army chief took extensions and I am sure he had the similar feelings. I was also offered extension but I refused not

that I love army less but two incidents in last year convinced me that retiring with honour is much more important than lingering on with army just for the sake of pay is a dangerous bargain. Army life is slippery and dicey, any minor issue can erupt into a major conflict. An issue starting from occupation of guest room can end up in a case of possessing unauthorised weapons and not registering them in private arms register.

I first had an encounter in 58 Medium ack ack in 1984 December as a second lieutenant when I attended the dine out of my second in command's , he was retiring. Days passed by and I realise that the social platform has varying tiers in society off which the retired officer is at lowest level. You are reduced to an ordinary citizenship rights, no more salutes and no more taking actions on files, none is scared of you and none rushes to you in the manner in which they do for serving officers. For a second lieutenant this was all too Greek.

Remount Depot Mona

Quetta Cantonment, 1996-1999.

I am writing this on 30th June 2014, at Quetta, I came here on 25th June , on a C-130 aircraft courtesy of Lt Col Jawad Khan . who is a G-1 in southern command and we both are friends adting back to Skardu tenure.. I

am coming here after a lapse of almost 15 years and quite a world has changed in this time. The cantonment itself has improved drastically with plenty of parks in the cantonment, quality of roads is much better and certainly the number of regiments have increased in the area. Right now , it is noon time, first of Ramadan, I am sitting outside Jawad's room in Garrison Mess, all quiet around except the chirping of various birds, a warm wind is blowing but it is not that menacing probably I am sitting under shade and it has helped in having a low temperature but even otherwise it is definitely more bearable than any other city of Pakistan.

Quetta have an elevation of 5500 feet but all around are dry and barren mountains not above 11000 feet, in the cantonment is plenty of greenery and tree but over all the city and province is dry and void of water . In last one week since my arrival, I have been to the army aviation base, the very base where I served for over two years, I went to see my old residential flat where I lived with my family, my daughter Azadeh was born here and as such I do have a certain nostalgia associated with this town, my son Salik started his schooling here and I bought a Russian jeep as well thus let me recount the events from start.

Today when I roam around and Jawad has been taking me around, it is bit difficult to recognise the old streets and messes, they have changed a bit, Quetta is a

well laid cantonment and every army officer have served here by virtue of the infantry school and the staff college. I first came here in 1985 to attend the infantry school, I had arrived by the air, it was the ady hwen Miandad hit his afmous six at Sharjah. It was other arms course thus mainly my own course mates in other arms including captain Waqas who was my room mate. The course tempo was fast and gruelling leaving very little time for any other activities which in later yaers I learnt are quite in this other wise bore city. At that time the major attraction was the food namely Mir Afzal ki Karhai, Lal Kebab Wala and Tajik wine store. Quetta at time to me looked as the most open city because wine was being sold quite openly. Quetta was also famous for Iranian motorbikes which were being sold at a reduced price but they were a contraband item as afr as army discipline is concerned.

The life or routine was simple, breakfast in morning, then classes, lunch in mess and then asiesta , study in evening , dinner in mess and then again study and sleep. In this the food quality at mess was very poor and there were always some kind of distraction of some officer having averbal match with mess staff. The course was a mixture of both PMA and OTS officers and both did not had best of relations among themselves collectively, individually there was friendship but collectively nothing of this sort. Infantry school has its

own reputation and it certainly lived up to it. Our instructor was Captain Abid of Baluch Regiment who later retired as brigadier, there were few directing staff officers who have been our instructors in military academy thus a bit of informality with them. Learning appreciation was the main feature of this course, this appreciation of field and enemy is the foundation of all army operations starting from platoon to corps level. I came here after having attended my own basic and weapon course both with disastrous grading, hence I was firm to have a good grade and I did get B plus, which is the highest as A is seldom given, my point to bring home is that if one works hard then a good grade is always possible.

There was a little hotel, where present day Musketter is, this was mainly a tea point for the batmans of officers and served tea and pakoras, the tea was famous and most sought after as it had been laced with Bhang. Infantry school also had the tradition of a 'course fighting with the police in the city', facts support it because in 1985 and 1984 there were instances of such kind and then they developed into a tradition. Mostly it would be revolving around a subaltern being checked by a policeman for motorcycle papers and then it would end up with whole course at the site, 70th Long Course had this episode. Carpets, sweaters, water coolers were the main items of officers shopping list at the end of course.

There was no ATM or online banking, officers had an authority letter from their bank , basing upon which they could draw their pay from the same bank's branch in Quetta, other was to ask a course mate to facilitate this by arranging the money from the canteen contractor; a cheque was given to the canteen contractor in lieu. There was no recreational point other than the Quetta Club and the Chinese restaurant at the edge of the cantonment. There were few Sri Lankan officers also attending the course with us, their living accommodation was much better than us and we use to have friendly terms with them and often played cricket with them. There was absolute peace in the city, one could roam around as long as one wants , no restriction.

I next came here after a lapse of ten years in 1996 with my squadron, from Multan and stayed here for three years. In between I had flown from Sukkur twice on a mission apart from the long aerial navigation with army aviation school in 1988.

Geographically the Baluchistan is a god forsaken place, with very scarce water supply mainly the melting of snow in summer is the lifeline thus greenery is so rare, yet Quetta is famous for its fruits, dry fruits, shopping, sight seeing points like Hanna and Urk Lakes. Unlike frontier province or Peshwar very little is known about Baluchis by the army officers in general and civilian population in particular. Nawab akbar bugti remains the

last lion of Baluchistan at that time when I was serving in Quetta. I arrived with train from the Multan with the squadron, Lt Col Suhail Ikram Siddiqui was our commanding officer and other officers include Majors Afridi, Daud, Asif Shaukat, Asim, Tahir Amir, Masood Akhtar, Nadeem Ghaus and Captains included Ikram, Basharat, Basit, Amir Saeed, Omar Rana, Nadeem.....

Train journey or movement was the very first experience for most of us and in this regard Major Daud Tariq did a lot of hard work in preparing the moveables and other items. It is a tedious and bureaucratic workload, our squadron had to take over the 27 Squadron in Quetta and they had to take over our building, stores, barracks and other items, we were carrying our own transport and same was the case with helicopters. The whole squadron including officers families and other ranks families had to move with the squadron, leaving their homes at Multan, packing all the items and moving to Quetta where they will get new accommodation and hence settling down, children left their school at Multan and were supposed to get enrolled at Quetta, it is a herculean task but army system is so well organised and oiled that it works efficiently and although there are always some loose ends but by and large it works. The first step was to get the train from Pakistan railways, it has its own classification of bogies, some are fit enough to carry the vehicles, other

are closed boogies for stores and then the passenger boogies for families and officers, all weapons were loaded, they had to be secured. One team from each squadron went to the multana nd quetta and then handing –taking over starts , the most irritating piece of work, The teams included an officer and couple of junior commissioned and non commissioned officers who physically checks each and every item of the squadron , because they have to take it on their charge and simulatanously at quetta our team was taking over. Thus both squadrons were in a fixed situation and in the end mutual baragin did work. The issues surrounding such moves includes the pending electric and ags bills of squadrons at their respective stations, the barrack damage like broken window panes and door knobs etc etc.

The move was classic, I was feeling light because my wife had to saty at Multan as she was posted at military hospital and would move only when posting orders would arrive. It took us three nights to reach Quetta, we all officers had our private cars also on the tarin. Myself and Capatin Nadeem{later he died in an heli crash at Skardu in 1998}were in the raer of the tarin , it wasa scene from Sholay movie, we also spent time with engine drivers who made us wise on how to make a cup of tea using ginger in it, it helps in stomach digestion and aalso acts as a stimulus for alertness. We arrived at

quetta at mid ady and spent the next one ady in unloading of the tarin and ensuring that equipment is safely tucked in stores, officers families were accommodated in aviation mess and troops in the respective quarters. After two days the life took its normal routine.

I made the best of time by having a five week trip to Burma on leave ex-Pakistan. I sold my car to major Naveed Akbar for 1,60,000. It was given to me by my father on my promotion to major rank, I kept half the amount to buy something which is moving later and rest I used for the leave. My wife acme to know about it only when I called her from Rangoon.

After two months , week after I had come back from the Burma , my wife got her posting order to CMH Quetta and I went back to Multan for final packing{she did all the packing} and then we three flew to Quetta, her car and other household items were booked on a truck. The main issue was that I did not had the accommodation for myself or family. I was living in the mess in a single room shared with another officer. At last moment, courtesy Major Bashaart Noor, I got a guest room for three days and then I got a room in EME Mess which was in process of demolition and renovation, I was given the blank cheque to stay as long as I like, but the work of demolition was so fast moving that in the end, we both{myself and wife and little Salik} had to

tread precariously on the stairs going upstairs , the room did not had any electric heater and the gas heater had the gas leaking and the headache which it cause is terrible. Winter had set in and as such we all would sleep with our heavy clothes on, water was cold and heated with a kerosene burner which I bought from the market. Luckily this ordeal did not last very long as at the end of winter we occupied the newly constructed set of four Married Officers quarters, it was allotted to our squadron, I was on ground floor along with Captain Amir Saeed, with Captain Basit and Omar Rana occupying the upper floor. Basit and saeed were newly wed and Omar rana had a year old son, I had a four years old son. For next two and ahlf years we lived here.

The residential block was located adjacent to Mess No.13 and it had a boundary wall with Ordanance Mess where Lieutenant Chanzeb of our squadron was having a room, a very fine officer indeed. I would spent most of the time with him, as it suffices the bachelor room aura and nostalgia. It is something which only an officer who likes the mess life can understand and majority do so , when you get married then the mess becomes a dream, one misses the bachelor days and especially the room, thus I would regulary drop in at Chanzeb's room for a cup of tea.

Routine was simple, squadron Suzuki pick up would pick up at morning, Major Afridi would be sitting

in the front seat and we all in the raer, arrive at squadron at 0755 hours, this pick and drop facility is available in army only to aviators . The vehicle would pick the officers from one end, mostly married officers first, then our MOQ , then mess and in same pattern would drop us. One has to be raedy with his flying abg at the fixed time, the vehicle would give one horn and then wait for few minutes depending upon your relations with the senior most and then moves on. The return time was never fixed and it varied depending upon the commanding officer's mood. Lt col Ikram had one quality apart from amny others, he was a squash player and as such would try to leave the office at 1415 hours, later Lt Colwas neither a sportsman and more over was living a forced bachelor life in mess thus in his tenure, it was very rare to have a lunch with family on time. It is the most frustrating thing, when there is no operational requirement and life is going through a peace patch, then to sit in office for long, carrying out nothing but sitting idle because commanding officer is busy in his telephone talks, an hour delay and better it is to spent the rest of evening in squadron because then neither you can have lunch with family and nor one can go for sports. In aviation squadron, there are seldom sports in evenings as the distances are quite afr , officers accommodation and mess.

Major Ali Imran a cavalry officer , I met him at Mona, he was undergoing advance equitation course and myself the basic, we both became friends and I found him here at Ghazaband Scouts, thus most of the time was spent in his company, Major Shuja Dogar of army aviation was the third person in this group, our common interest was riding apart from smoking. Ghazaband is half an hour drive from Quetta and I could drive there in the evening play polo and come back late at night, there was no fear or apprehension of driving at night in Quetta surroundings. My sister in law Squadron Leader fauzia was also posted at Samungli air base as doctor, her daughter Saroo and husband squadron Leader Sulal were also there, like so many other families the relationship between two sisters were not ideal but I had good rapport with Sulal and he would often drop in with his daughter. Major Masood Shah , my coursemate was my close friend in the squadron, one key factor in having a strong bond with coursemate is that one at the minimum can share the secrets with him ranging from the squadron politics to the domestic chores. Another officer whom I met after long time was Major.....of air defence , he was residing with his wife, they did not had any children, we pull along very well.

I tried to make a lawn in the flat compound, the contarctor had left the debris of concrete in the ground and as such it was difficult to plant the grass or any other

plants. The system is such that when the building is ready then it is taken over by the station headquarters and when they allot it to our squadron then we again inspect all the fixtures and other things before taking it over, once taken over the contractor is no more responsible for any alteration, thus key word is that as long as the signatures have not been affixed on the proforma the contractor usually runs after you but after signing, he is seldom seen. The flats are generally constructed according to military specifications , the minor issue of slope in washroom or in kitchen becomes a herculean task after taking over. Anyway to cut a long story short, I initially tried to get the working from squadron, it was partial success, tried few friends in cantonment and in the end I decided to level the ground myself. It is easier to write but difficult to perform, not because of physical exertion but mainly because it looks odd. Thus at night I would dig the ground and after few nights of work it was levelled. The shyness was not from own family or from own officers, rather it looked bit odd to dig the ground in the evening when the other lady wives were watching. In the end, the grass was planted and a small kitchen garden was made functional, the other three officers especially Amir Saeed who was on ground floor also got the initiative and some work was carried out. It was probably the first time in my life that I had not procrastinated and was happy with the result.

Water was plentiful and soon a lush green lawn of moderate size was ready.

This was also the first time that I was living with other squadron officers as married, I was the senior most thus it was at times embarrassing when all other would wish you while coming and going and then I requested them to offer their wish only once a day. Capatin Basit after some time left the army rather he just disappeared the way I did in 1991 and to date is still a deserter. His wife was a UK born Pakistani and as such it was obvious that sooner or later he would disappear, I met Basit in 2009 in England, he is happily settled there. The other officer was Major asif shaukat who also ahd a wife with British nationality and he remained in a dilemma as long as he was in army, he completed his tenure but through out he was always planning to leave but in the end when he did so, he could not adjust in England , came back and then went abck and soon took his last breath in 2009. This was quite a dilemma , in young age, the officers who got married with girls having the British or American nationality were envied upon as they would proceed to foreign lands on annual leave and would bring back stories of western civilisation, their lady wives definitely ahd that peculiar ascent of English, now you can imagine the social disparity when one is proceeding to England and other to Chiniot, however as time passes , very few such officers have been able to

adjust with the reality of both worlds , mostly they remained divided in a mental calculation of when to leave the army and leaving army is not an easy task, as they say you can enter it with your will but you will leave with seniors permission. Another friend and course mate of mine Major Khalid Javeed had the similar dilemma, when his wife went back to England, he put everything on sale including the flower pots, cutlery and her shoes and she unexpectedly came back and then Khalid was running around to collect the same items .

Major Wisal the doctor was also here, he was our doctor at Mona Depot and thus our quorum was complete.

Lt col Suhail, did a unforgettable work when he restored the old Mi-8 helicopter and above all he made the MI-35 serviceable, the gunship was lying at Multan with birds having it as their nestle, Lt col Suhail studied the helicopter and then after months of hard work he was able to fly it from Multan to Quetta, it was a big sensation then to see the gunship in air. I also logged around ten hours on the gunship.

Burma-Sri Lanka & Thailand

Gujranwala

Rawalpindi

Rawalpindi is like a second home to all army officers whether they belong to it or not, whether they like it or not but they have to live through it. As a cadet, the very first step was to report to General Headquarters to get the joining instructions, at least this is what happened with me and few more cadets who were bit late in getting selected. My early memory of this cantonment city is wrapped around a winter evening, mist around the air, chill, Morris Taxis and wet weather, greenery all around, a disciplined charade. The wagon to Abbottabad used to ply from Saddar , another Flying Coach stand was on Murre Road but it was meant for those going to Lahore. Thus on leave , the cadets would arrive in Rawalpindi, move in pairs wearing their academy blazers, on Friday evening they would ahagin swarmed the wagon stand and depart for academy. After passing out , every one has to pass through this city and then in the course of career a major time would be spent here , so much that few officers would spent an entire life in this city moving from one directorate to other. Signals, EME branches had their training schools in this city thus these officers would spent spent at least three years here and then many more as student undergoing

further courses and also as instructors. The coursemates deployed at Kashmir and in Northern areas would also pass through this city, staying with the friends undergoing the courses, it was not unusual to see more than four or five officers spending nights in one room of a friend, who often had to pay for their mess bill too.

My first interaction was in 1986, when the army bought and inducted Giraffe Radar from Sweden, officers were required to undergo the basic training on it from the Swedish instructors and then to train the regiments. I was also selected for it, not because of any particular reason but my regiment could not spare any one else other than a second lieutenant and this is how I landed in Rawalpindi. We were accommodated at Ojhari camp in tents, a military truck would take us in the morning to the westridge via the Pir wadhai road. I was the junior most officer, there were ten more officers almost all are retired now, one of them is a major general now, they included captain Babar, captain tanveer and my best friend Captain salik Cheema, who was my tent mate also, his coursemates were undergoing the Signal course thus I had an opportunity to roam with him and listen to the spicy and weird stories, which were mostly revolving around love, sex and crime happening close by. Murre Road used to be deserted at night from Moti Mahal onwards, no taxi or public transport. Salik arranged a motorcycle from his unit officer Captain

tariq, it was a Hnda Atlas 110, a tricky motorcycle, we made it road worthy and later { I spent almost a yaer with Giraffe Radar vin Rawalpindi and Kahutta} I got my bike and Salik too had his own Yamaha 100. I had reported in October, winter was setting in and Rawalpindi definitely had one of the most romantic winter season among all plain cantonments. Wet and chilly with occasional rain, , we had little money thus it was mainly roaming around and filling the petrol tank. Rawalpindi have a different dialect, public confident , almost everyone knows someone in army and those who does not have such links are in process of making one. Girls not very attractive and neither male are any symbol of any manly beauty, majority of them have feeble structure, worst are the public transport drivers the worst in the country , almost at par with Lahore in misbehaviour. There are many idioms regarding the Rawalpindi crowd, they are quick to lodge a petition against anyone whether true or false.

I had the first

Skardu

Ramadan in Army

Ramadan in army is special, it has its own traditions and ethics. I first had the encounter in military

academy, my own perception was that life would be easy at least in this month but it was not like this, there was no change in the routine or training, only difference was that now in the Sehri , the cadets had to go to the mess for eating sehri, dress was kameez shalwat with sherwani, nothing to eat all day as all the cafes and fruit shops were closed only canteen was opened and water was definitely coming through the water taps in bathroom , thus it was more of a mental and physical torture if one is not keeping a fast than those who were keeping the fast and majority were keeping it , yet a large number of cadets would find it hard to do so, yes one major advantage was in the suspension of punishments for traveeh and prayers but , it was also not fully abolished, other was the rather sympathetic attitude of the senior cadets in this month. It had its own disadvantages as the juniors were also task to fetch the sehri for the seniors from the mess. Many cadets like Farhat, Mussrat, Khalid to name a few would bring the sehri back to the room wrapped in a paper and hidden in the pockets.

In army , in the regiment at Sargodha the Ramadan was different, the office timings were relaxed with work starting at 0800 hours and pack up at 1300 hours, tea bar would remain closed , same holds true for the mess which was providing the sehri and iftari and no lunch, thus for an officer not eager to fast the life was

difficult. Smoking in open or eating anything or drinking was prohibited, troops had special menu in ramadan for sehri and iftaari, mainly having a curry made of potatoes with mince and extra items like samosa and pakoras in iftaari, the routine was relaxed for the troops but still the military routine is such that no amount of relaxation can made it comfortable in Ramadan. Firing, sports, drill competitions, collective training, courses goes on.

Sehri was brought by the batman from the mess in tiffin box, paratha and mince meat with yogurt and tea, he would wake you up, leave the sehri and then goes for his own sehri, after eating sehri , which mostly was taken by the bachelors collectively in room, then those who were really fasting would offer the prayers and other would just go back to sleep. Waking up at 0730 hours, change into uniform and walk to office, everything look and felt different as there were no more cigarettes and tae, two items without which majority of the officers felt almost half dead. Initial days are tough , as officers would tend to loose the temper{smokers} , work efficiency would take a dip and then readjusted. My commanding officers { Lt colonels , Omar, sarwar and Ilyas} were all non smokers , thus they had no such issue , battery commanders {majors Ibrar, JR Khan} were all smokers, and they had to adjust with Ramadan. In the evening the sports were palyed with a zeal and passion, it was the best way to pass the evening, football,

basketball, to name few sports were palyed and then minutes before the Iftaari, a quick shower, change of dress and to the mess for iftaari which ahd the glass of rooh Afza, samosa, pakora, fruit chaat, dates and then break for prayers and dinner, after dinner , traveeh and back to bed.

Iftaar and dinner parties were part of the Ramadan tradition, every regiment in the brigade would host one such party , many married officers would invite the bachelors to their homes for the iftaari and bachelors would also reciprocate in same manner.

Iftaar parties had their own decorum, sitting arrangements in the mess lawn, with separate chairs for male and females, breaking the fast with date and rooh afza and other traditional items like fruit chaat, dehi balay, channna chaat, samosa and pakoras, then prayers in the lawn, ladies would offer the prayers inside the mess, then dinner and pack up before the traveeh.

In ramadan it was looked with disgust if any officer consumed alcohol , I think almost all officers observed the grace of Ramadan. As the month passes by the life gets settled, myself would have the tea break which was prepared and brought to the office wrapped and covered same holds true for smoking or having cup of tea, an officer having medical attend was allowed to have the food in the day but discreetly.

As an officer I had the first ramadan of my career in Karach , where I went as a subaltern to attend the four month long basic course, environment in school of air defence like other school of instructions were not conducive for the newly commissioned officers, mess was at distance and quality of food is seldom satisfactory in school where a large number of officers attend the course, it was tough even to those who were not fasting, first was getting up for sehri and then for classes, most of us had the biscuits or the sehri preserved for lunch.

I had three Ramadan with my regiment in Sargodha , including one in which we had our annual firing too. I was at that time had a friendly affair with a nurse of PAF and as such I was always welcomed at AFNS Mess at the air base.

I joined army aviation in 1988 and it was here that I found the difference, in aviation it is against the flight safety for a pilot to fast, yet majority would keep the fast and fly, it included both the instructors and students. Years of guilt feeling for not adhering to the Ramadan rituals was always on my mind and heart but now I felt light hearted rather I had the moral advantage as I was now adhering the rules and I think I have followed it in letter and spirit. In aviation, the mess would be operating as normal, any pilot can have the breakfast, tea and can smoke in crew room, nothing unusual in it. Army aviation Mess at Rawalpindi was the

most sought after mess in the town as it was the only mess in the garrison which would remain open during Ramadan and serve the lunch, thus a high number of guests from signal and other schools and military colleges of garrison.

In army aviation it was the other way around, the flying rules and regulations forbids the crew to fast and fly but here in religious enthusiasm the majority of the crew would fast and fly. Sometimes the commanding officer or the captain of the aircraft would ensure that the crew is not fasting by having a cup of tea with the crew before flying. The main drawback of fasting and flying may not be so obvious in the early morning flying but definitely any mission being undertaken in the latter part of the day is risky as the reflexes of the pilot gets slow due to lack of sugar.

The cooks in army whether in officers' mess or soldiers mess needs special praise as they prepare the sehri and iftaari, and in summer heat it is not an easy task. Similar feelings are for lady wives and batman who do the same in homes.

In small garrisons, the regiments do have their own canteens and this month is quite busy and profitable for them as the sale of samosa and pakora touches unprecedented heights in this month. Another feature of Ramadan in army is the declining number of guests in

the regiments. It is a tradition and custom that any visiting officer is offered either tea or cold drink or both on any given day at any time , but in this month, nothing is offered.

Sending of Eid cards was an integral part of Ramadan. Every regiment will have its own crested Eid card , the design and cover would change with the command but they were of standard size, white in colour{majority} with a ribbon on surface, inside Eid greetings were printed but the name of recipient and sender was hand written and it was the duty and task of adjutant to get it written, thus the education staff would meticulously write the names , it was very sensitive in nature as the name of recipient had to be correct{mostly senior officers}, the recipients included all serving officers of the regiment serving outside, brigade and divisional staff, all in all a regiment would be despatching 100-150 Eid cards.

Individual officers especially the young officers would also send the cards to all, especially the course-mates and regimental officers, as the years pass the list increases and then decreases. The adjutant would place all the incoming Eid cards in the tea bar or in his office, it was a beautiful scene to see so many regimental crested cards displayed. Personal cards would be displayed in the officer's living room and an officer would take delight and pride in the number of cards he

had despatched and received. These cards were sent through the army mail which requires no stamp, only the army number of the sender and the date are written on the envelope and rest of data was written by the clerk, thus there was a date when these could be despatched, usually 25th of Ramadan. This custom and tradition have died down slowly, I think by 2005 it was almost extinct, as far as the sending of the individual Eid cards is concerned, mobile texting took its place. In between, in the name of austerity the army started discouraging the sending of Eid cards officially and now hardly any one sends or received Eid cards.

Eid

The most looked after festival, it is celebrated at the end of the Ramadan and definitely one cannot express the joy which comes at the end of fasting, whether one has fasted or not. In army, Eid has its own style and flair. First and foremost is the issue of leave for the troops and officers, everyone wants to proceed on leave at least on this occasion. Within the regiment, army has laid down the minimum strength which has to be present on any given day thus Eid leave also has its limitations and it is within these restrictions that troops play their cards in getting the leave. As an adjutant one would be bombarded with the requests for leave, old registers would be checked and those troops who had not availed the Eid leave last year would be given preference

same holds true for officers. A young officer in any case was and is still expected to spend the leave with his troops. I spent majority of Eid leaves with the troops.

In school of instructions while undergoing a course, the Eid brings its own issues, main being the leave and 'duty officer' an officer had to be a duty officer on Eid too and I am talking of days when there was no such thing as terrorist threat.

Within the cantonment, a Chaand Raat would be celebrated, either in the main mess lawn or in garrison club or in the park but it had to be there. In Sargodha I never saw it because it was never held, I think it was in late eighties and only in major garrison that this concept took birth, aim was to have bangles and mehndi and fun food for the ladies and girls. A regiment would be task to arrange it, within the regiment the adjutant, quartermaster and second in command with commanding officer monitoring the affairs would sit down and plan the Chand Raat, transport would ferry the carpets , sofas and most importantly the gamlas without which no army function can take place. Civilian food vendors would also be hired apart from army cook. As the Chand Raat is supposed to be the last night before the Eid, thus it had its own suspense, in Pakistan seldom the nation has agreed on celebrating the Eid on a single day, mostly the people of frontier province celebrate it in line with the Saudi Arabia and rest of the country adheres to the

official announcement regarding Eid, thus even the Chand Raat Mela was quite a tricky affair, many a times it was abandoned at last time as Eid moon was not sighted and at times it was celebrated at late hours because the official announcement regarding Eid would be announced quite late in night.

Eid morning starts with Eid prayers, for which again a regiment is task to arrange it, arrangements usually includes the Shamianas {fly covering} prayer mats, parking facilities for incoming persons, water and so on. The timings are given a day ahead and are generally followed, the senior most officer has a reserve place in the front row for the prayers, it was again done with a smartness, a soldier would occupy the place and would vacate it when the senior officer arrives. Dress invariably is kameez shalwar with waist coat. After the prayers everyone would try to embrace the senior most officer and officers.

In early years after the prayers the junior officers would go the mess and have the breakfast which is traditional Vermicelli's, Eid embrace with mess staff who certainly looks forward to the Eidi and which officer usually gives by signing the chit as he seldom carry cash in pocket. A lunch with troops known as Bara Khanna , it was consumed at 1200 hours, commanding officer and officers present in regiment attends it, cash

prize for the cook at the end of meal and shahbash to all others.

In early days, the rest of the day was spent in the room watching movies on regiment VCR and TV, loitering in the city, it was common that married officers would invite the bachelor officers for lunch or tea in their homes and even if they have not invited, even then it was normal to visit their homes on Eid.

Cantonment gives a festive look , with ladies and children wearing colourful attire , sometimes there used to be a Eid dinner also in the mess but it varies with garrison to garrison. Traditionally the army chief or the divisional commanders spent the Eid with troops deployed. In those times, I mean before the onset of security regime, the cantonments were the most sought after picnic spots for the civillians , especially in Gujranwala, Kharian, Okara, multan and Lahore cantonments. In Gujranwala, on eid day and on taro the road from rahwali gate to Nishan Manzil used to be a colourful linear vista, the Nishan Manzil itself would be jam packed . Majority of these civillians were poor and it was their once a year chance to visit the much talked about cantonment and enjoy its beauty, playgrounds and ambience. I had one of the classic Eid there with my children back in 2000, the old medieval pattern merry go round, colourful ballons, monkey and bear show, ice cream and boating. Going back down the memory lane,

in 1982-1984, during the military academy Eid leave, myself and Farhat used to be together in Lahore, it used to be trend to watch the movie, new movies were released on Eid.

FIFA Cup

FIFA world cup is a landmark and milestone held after every four years, I saw the first world cup which was held at Argentina in 1986 when I was a lieutenant at Rawalpindi's Ojhari camp with captain Salik Nawaz Cheema SJ posthumously, Taslimon Abbas Hyder, Lt col retired, Shaukat, Tanveer and major general..... and many others} I was the junior most then. Matches were aired live at evening and night time, a black and white television was placed in open with easy chairs in front, mess staff ready with tea. Maradonna was the icon and certainly the favourite. There would be high pitch discussions in which the seniors' comments carry the weight.

Next FIFA cup and I was in Karachi as a captain in army aviation, satellite receivers were a new thing then and we in squadron did not had one, the brigade at Rahim Yar Khan had the very first dish. I was detailed for few days' attachment at Panu Aqil along with captain Shahid and we made a sortie of forty five minutes to fly to Rahim Yar Kahn to watch the opening match and other few matches. In Karachi, the holiday Inn was

hosting the matches and I vividly recall the British diplomats coming to the hotel, booking a room and then leaving the hotel rather dejected after their team lost.

1994 FIFA at USA , I watched at Multan , I was now a major and married and it was difficult to watch them as they clashed with my wife's soap operas. 1998 FIFA cup found me at Abbottabad where I was part of army mountaineering expeditions, I travelled to Newshehra to watch the match with my friend Major Kalid Shahbaz who was the brigade major there. I had the dinner with him and then watched the two matches, final was witnessed at PT school mess where Major Khattak, Nadeem Ghaus and Obaid had arrived too for the purpose. 2002 FIFA Cup held at Japan and Korea , I was now at Aviation Mess Rawalpindi and had two children , it was fun to watch these matches with children tugged alongside, 2006 FIFA cup was most memorable, I was at Skardu, the television reception was poor and only Chinese television was broadcasting it live which we could watch it in Skardu, myself and my son watched the complete tournament together, Rooney was the favourite so was Ronaldo of Portugal about whom I think , he was too dramatic and foul player. 2010 Cup at South Africa was witnessed at Aitcheson college Lahore where I was the house master of Kelly House and now the 2014 cup I am watching at Garrison Mess Quetta , where I am guest of Lt Col Jawad Khan, the tournament

ahs progressed to last 16 and today France has defeated Nigeria by 2-0, yesterday Netherland defeated Mexico by 2-1, Brazil has already defeated Chile on penalties so has Costa Rica who have beaten Greece, next match is that of Germany against Algeria.

In army, it seems the South American teams especially the Brazil is the most favourite followed by Argentina, no player has caught the imagination of crowd more than Maradonna, Ronaldo of Brazil comes next, I don't think any European player has been the darling of the crowd in army. I personally like Germany, nothing specific about it other than that in 1989 I had a long vacation with a German blonde in Thailand and since then I support Germany. Regarding the players , I like Klinsmann and Roeddi Voeller of past German teams and now Klose. English team has never progressed beyond quarter finals in all these years but the media which is mainly British always create a hype about them , Beckham is one such player and I think two matches stands out , one involves England against Argentina , which England won including a free kick goal by Beckham , the other match was Iran against USA in 1998, I listened to this match on radio while with army mountaineering team at Passu, I had an acute tooth ache as such sleep was far away and I listened to all the matches on radio as long as we stayed at the mountains ,

luckily managing to fall back to Abbottabad for the finals.

FIFA cup always arouse a a passion of the game among the troops, the football tournaments are arranged by brigades or divisions do reflect the mood of FIFA matches, the referees also copied the international referees . I may add that in army the passion and involvement of troops and officers is deep rooted at least it was so before the war against terror erupted. There are two matches which I recall, one was at Sargodha in which my regiment and 89 Light Ack Ack both were put on long marches due to on field fight and second was at Multan involving the two Cobra squadrons where similar act took place, the spectators all army troops , the soldiers of both squadrons were sitting on both sides of the ground , rushed to the ground when the officer of one squadron was hit by the player of the other and soon it was a open fight which lasted for few minutes and then both teams were suspended and put on long route march for a week with a court of inquiry.

